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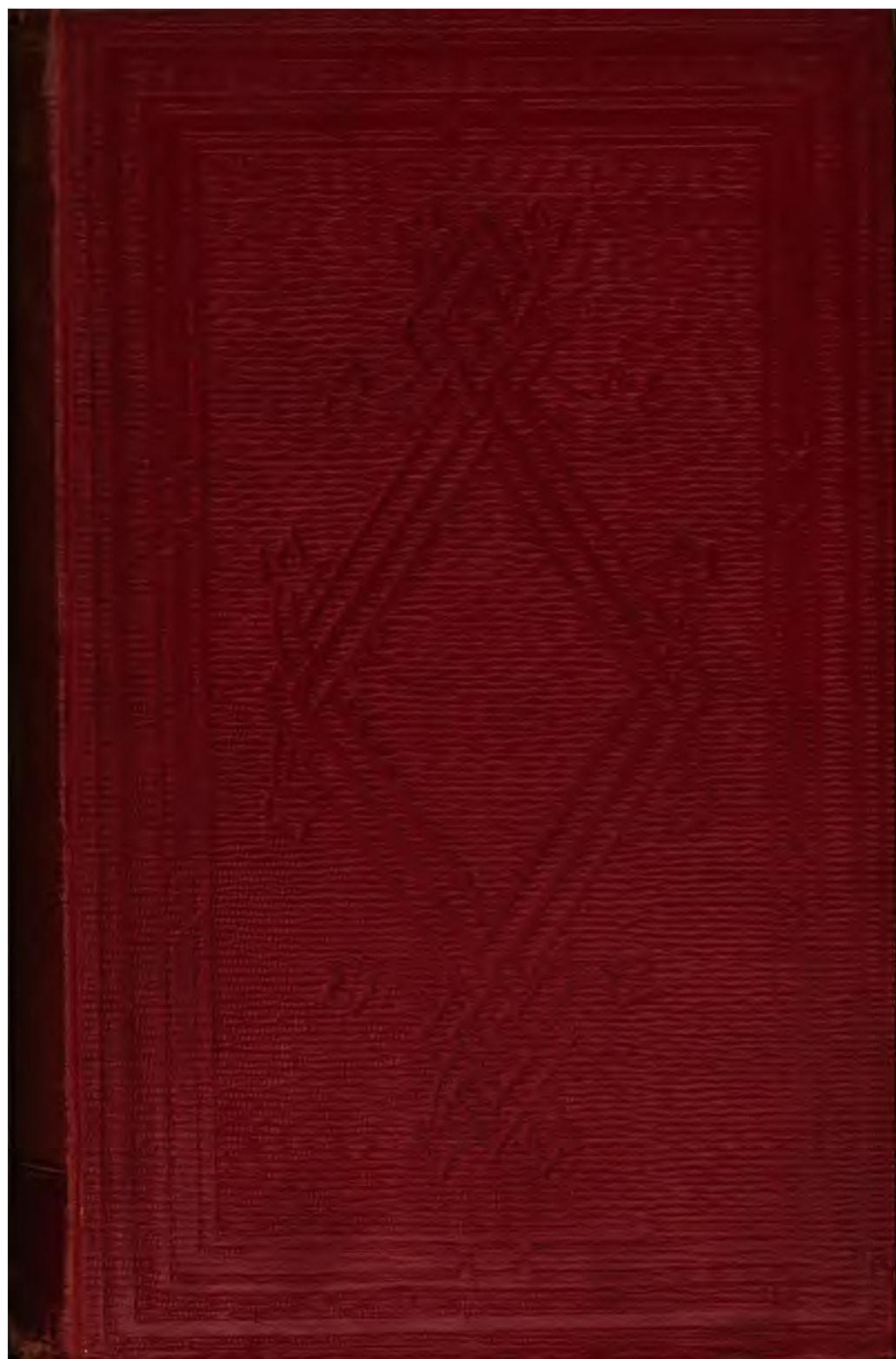
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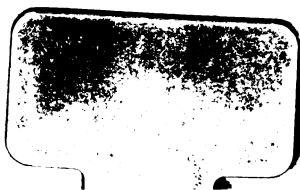
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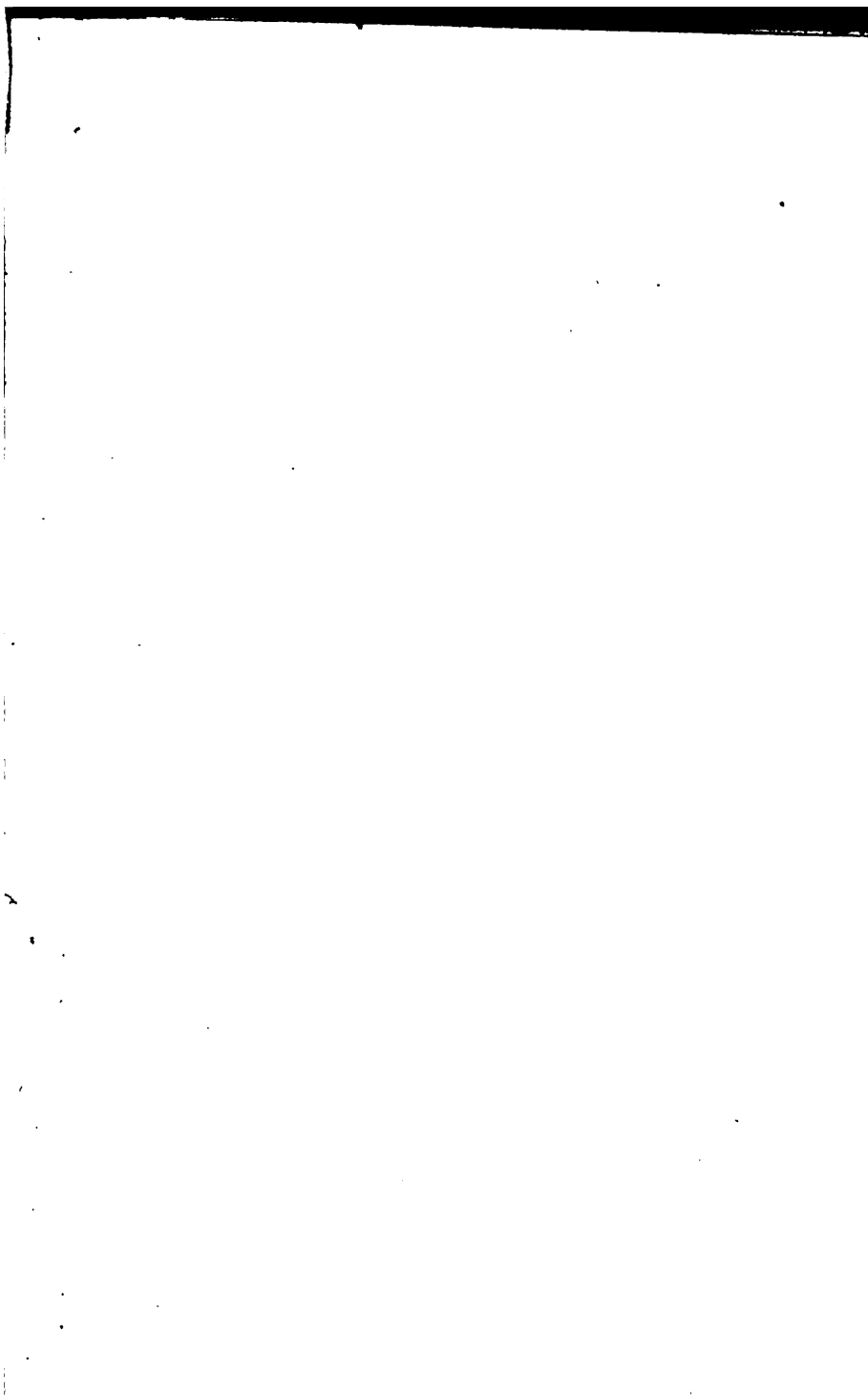
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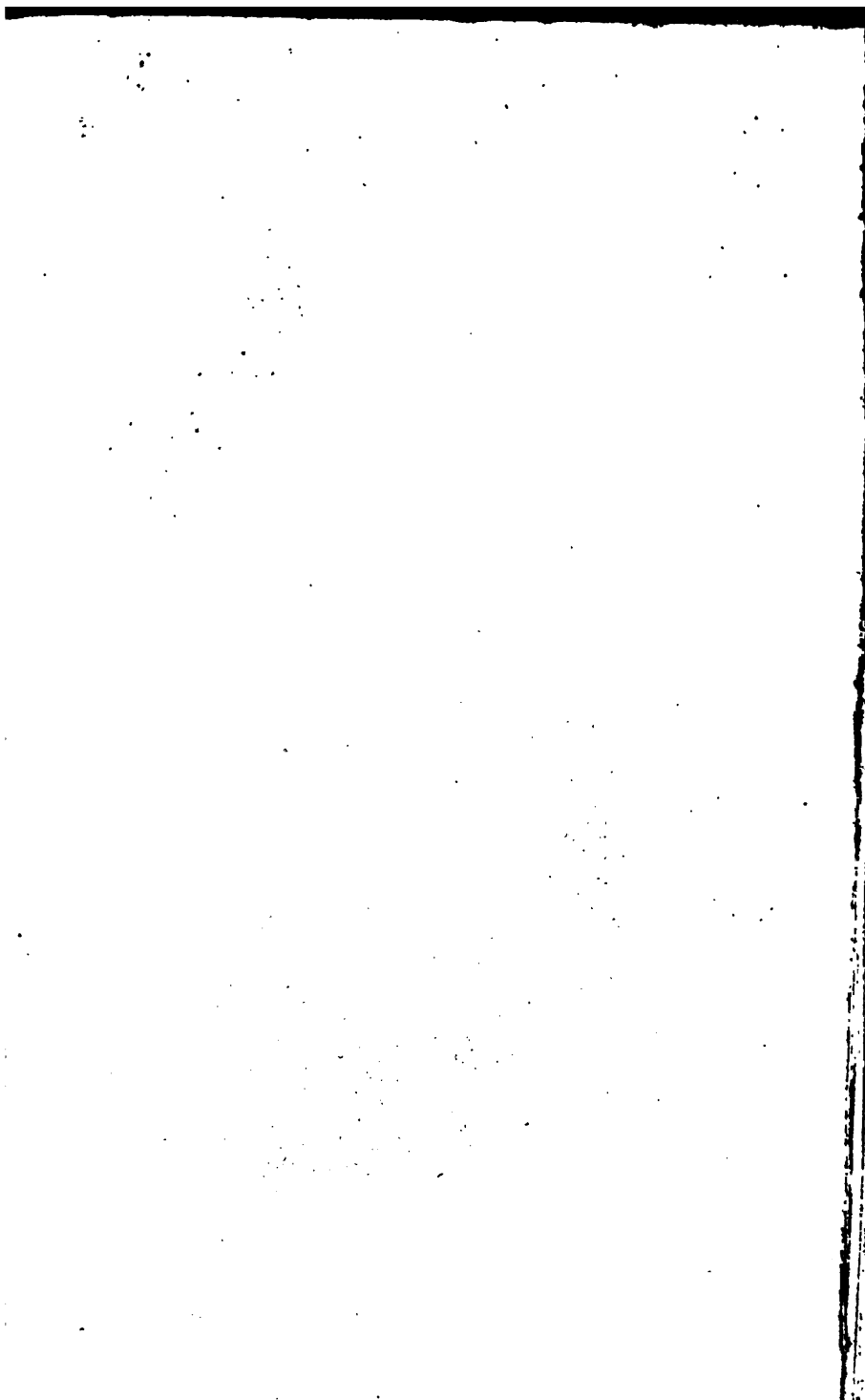


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RACHEL.

London, Hurst & Blackett, 1858.

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BY JOHN B. HENRY

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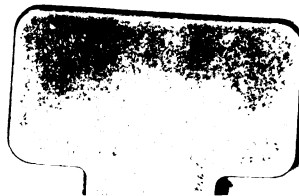
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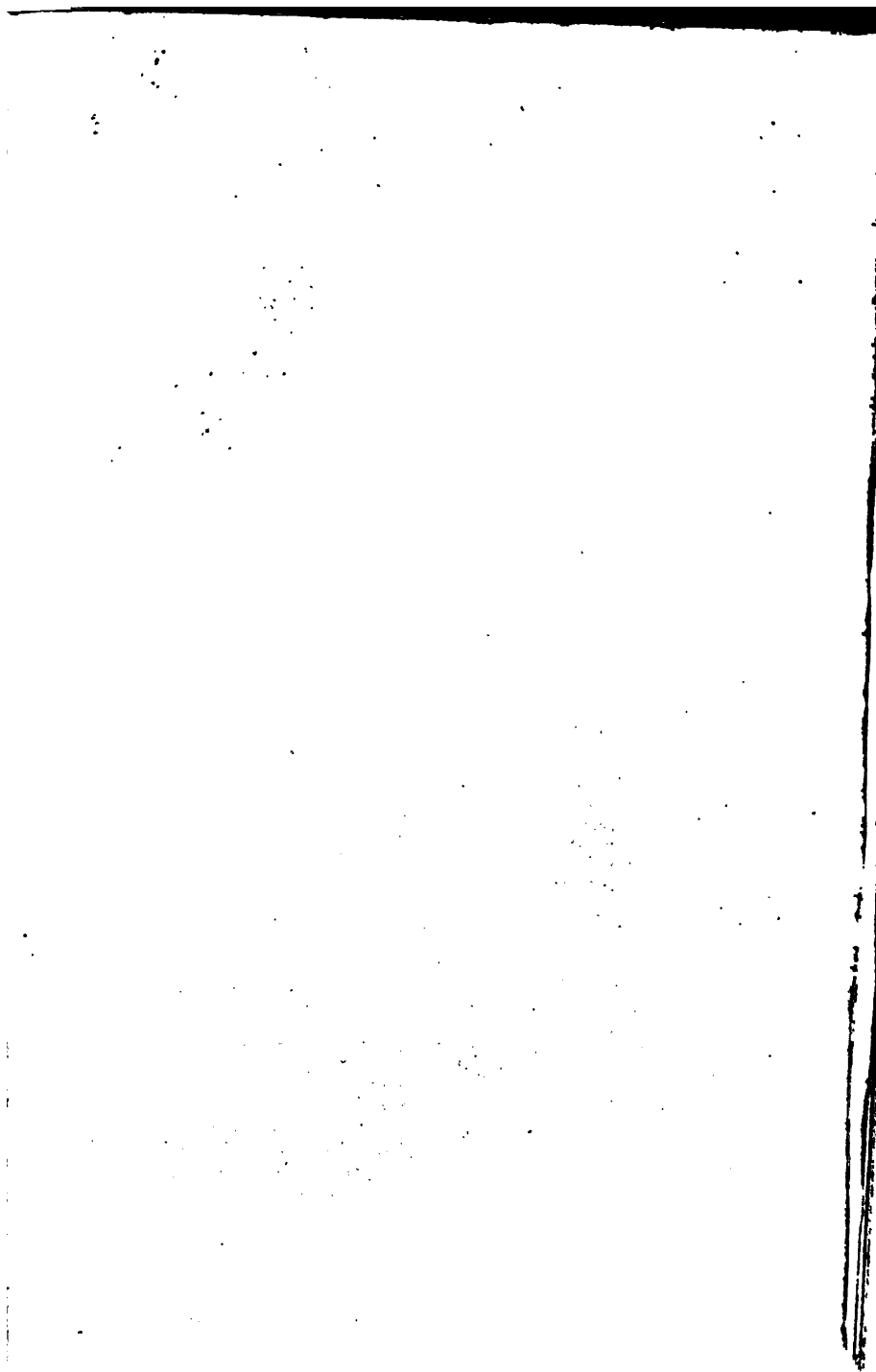


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London, Hurst & Blackett, 1855.

# MEMOIRS OF RACINE.

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HURST AND BLACKMAN,

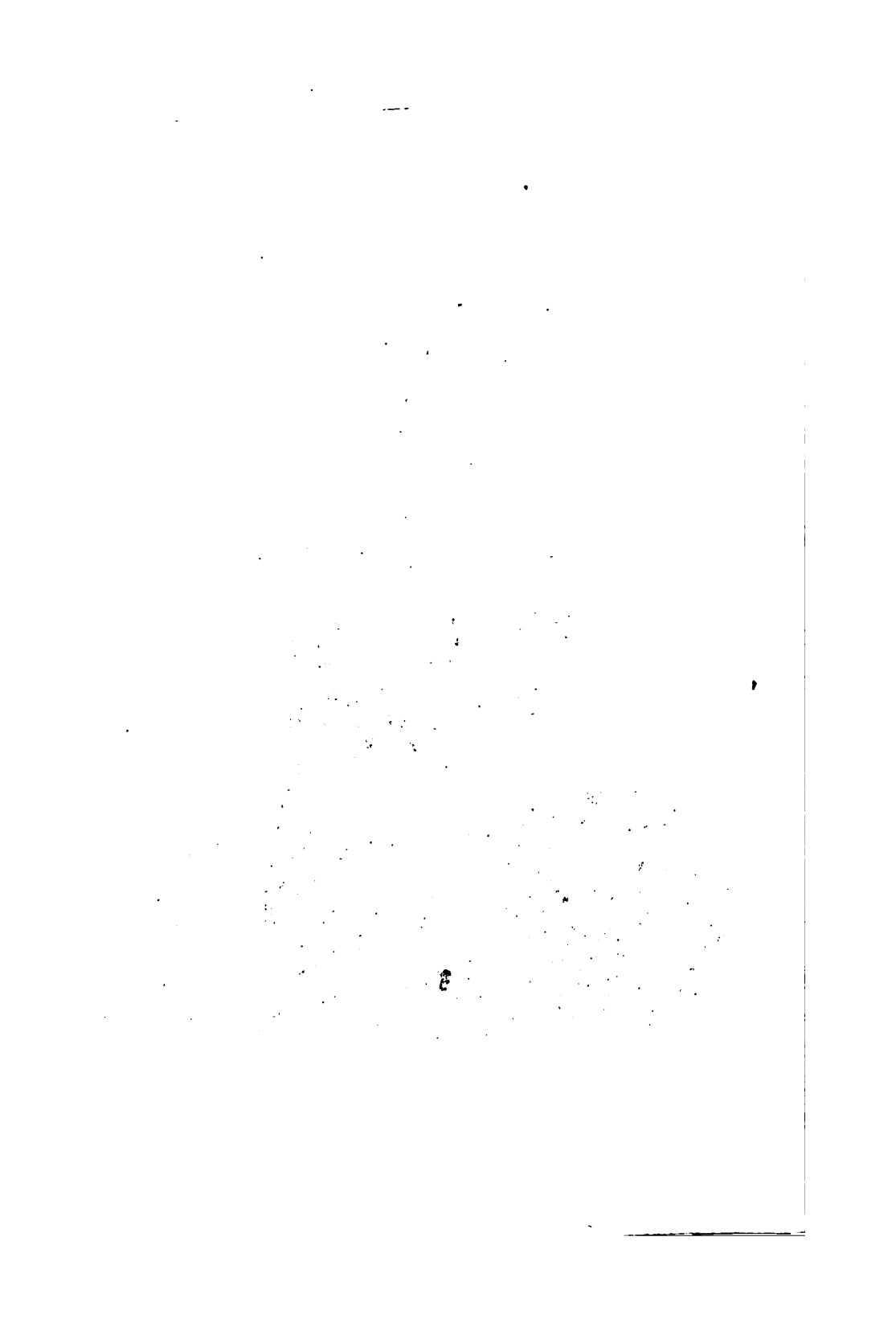
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1848.

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# MEMOIRS OF RACHEL.

BY

MADAME DE B—.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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## PREFACE.

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IN order to form a correct judgment on celebrated persons, we should have a previous knowledge of the sphere in which they moved, of the circumstances in which they were placed, of the epoch at which their star arose.

Among those whose names the many-tongued dame has borne to the remotest corners of the civilised world, none have exemplified more forcibly than Rachel the truth of the Spanish adage which accords the palm not to the most deserving, but to him who arrives in time. Be this not understood, however, as a disparagement of the merit of the justly celebrated daughter of Israel. But, without in the least intending to detract from talent so universally acknowledged, it must be allowed that in her case Fortune came most opportunely to the aid of genius, and that every

event, from the commencement to the close of her career, justified to the utmost her surname of Felix.

Genius, even when seconded by persevering Will, is not sufficient to conquer the heights Ambition would scale; it needs the concurrence of auspicious circumstances, and Chance, though aptly called the God of fools, has drawn from stagnant obscurity Napoleons, Shakspeares and Newtons, who else had ignobly lived and ingloriously died.

The moment when Rachel came forward was that of a crisis. The public was weary of the clamors of the partisans of the old school and of those of the new. The question which had kindled so fierce a war between the Classicists and the Romanticists was about to be decided in favor of the latter. Tragedy was at its last gasp; the theatre, so long the admired and envied model of all Europe, was tottering to its foundations under the load of debt which the indifference and neglect of a fickle public had allowed to accumulate upon it. The few actors of any talent who still lingered about the forsaken temple vainly sought to resist the torrent that bore them

into the ranks of the exultant Romanticists; compelled to worship the false gods they reluctantly apostatised from the creed of which they had once been the worthy champions. Nor should the impartial chronicler too hastily condemn these recreants; the performance of tragedies had become impossible from the lack of competent tragic actresses; the *débutantes* half converted to the new dogmas were no longer animated by the sacred fire; no extent of good-will could compensate the want of genius, of talent, of spirit; each new candidate for the scenic palm was the exact counterpart of her predecessor, reproducing before a wearied and disgusted public, the same faulty style, the same ranting, whining, monotonous, declamation; name succeeded name, and, passing unnoticed before a Parisian audience, sank, one after the other, into the same lethean obscurity, the provinces entombing each at the close of her short and epitaphless career.

Alas, the abomination of desolation had fallen on the sanctuary! Imperious, despotic Romanticism had pronounced its *quos ego!*—and the masterpieces of the French stage awaited in dust and forgetfulness an impro-

bable resurrection. The announcement of "Cinna," Andromaque," and "Merope," sufficed to transform the once-crowded house into a desert, and exhausted instead of replenishing the treasury.

With Talma, with Mademoiselle Duchesnois, true French tragedy had ended. We do not speak of Mademoiselle Georges, for she had forsaken her ethereal mistress for one of the earth earthy—*Marion Delorme* could not be expected to become the chaste and heroic *Pauline*, nor could *La Tisbé* exchange the fanciful garb of the Venetian courtesan to assume with the Roman robes, the Roman feelings of a *Junia*.

The Drama was triumphant—the Tragic Muse, still beautiful in her solitude and sadness, her rent and worn mantle ill concealing her poverty, her crown shivered, her proud throne mocked and defaced, her tears unseen, her sight unheeded, in forsaken, still imperial, majesty, the Great Relic of a Great Past, was preparing to flee for ever from the ingrate land that now worshipped a usurper, when the hand of a child arrested her flight and, for a brief space, restored her empire.

Three-fourths of the following pages were written during the life of the celebrated woman whose career constitutes their subject. As the work drew to a close, the tomb opened to receive her who for eighteen years had been the pride of the French stage. But the event that has cast so deep a gloom over the prospects of classic art, depriving it of its sole support, can make no difference in a work in which neither posthumous flattery nor detraction find a place. Even the truth due to the dead should be spoken within certain limits. When the faults and errors of one who attained so high a rank as an *artiste*, are trumpeted by the tongue of malice, or hinted at by the conscientious biographer, the reader must bear in mind the sphere in which she was born and passed her early youth, the intoxicating influence of unexpected fame and opulence, the bewildering effect of the sudden transition from the society of the low, the ignorant and vulgar, to that of the most high-bred, educated, and aristocratic of the land, the satiety and weariness that the prompt fulfilment of every wish soon brought with it, the nervously irritable and

constitutionally frail organisation of the being who was constantly called upon to personify the most violent and wearing passions ; let us not then wonder that her aspirations towards the good and the beautiful were often followed by no results, that the creature so richly endowed by prodigal nature, so powerfully sustained by fortune, should not have been uniformly great, and that blemishes should have darkened her finest traits.

Yet, with all her imperfections, it will be long ere the world shall see another Rachel, the stage another *tragédienne* uniting her genius, her intuitive conception of the sublime and the beautiful, her extraordinary power of expressing what she so perfectly conceived, her grand Pagan qualities, her Greek statue-like figure, her majesty of brow and attitude, her quiet dignity of manner. The lovers of art have sustained an irreparable loss, and mournfully exclaim :

“ There’s a great spirit gone ! ”

We have followed Rachel more especially in her professional career, without, however, omitting the more arduous task of speaking of her as the woman in her social sphere—a

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delicate subject at all times, since it necessitates the invasion of the sanctuary of private life, revealing its mysteries to a prying public—but more especially so in the present case.

We have endeavored to fulfil this task so far as it was consistent with the duty of biography to record the words and actions of its subject. But there are grounds it is not our province to touch upon—grounds that are beyond the limits of even the morbid curiosity that eagerly seeks in every great work that issues from the Divine Hand the contaminating touch of the spirit of evil—grounds where the truth is too obscure to be distinguished from fiction, and where, even if known, it would afford no better clue to character, would convey no lesson, prevent no fall.

If, then, those who delight in the indiscriminate revelations of the foibles of poor human nature take up this book in the hope of meeting with a detailed account of the *liaisons* attributed to the great *tragédienne*, we warn them that nothing so piquant seasons its matter-of-fact pages. Whatever could convey an idea of her character, temper and inclina-



tions, all that had any connection with her dramatic talent we were bound to record—farther we had nothing to add from the garrulous *chronique scandaleuse* of the day.

If tragedy did not die when disease laid so fatal a grasp on her last interpreter, at least she sank into so lethargic a sleep that the strenuous efforts made to arouse her have only proved their own fertility and justified the triumphant pens of her adversaries. She who could revive the life, the soul, is herself gone for ever. Well may we deplore the loss of the priestess who alone could rekindle the extinct flame, and exclaim :

“ Si Pergama dextrâ  
Defendi possent, etiam hâc defensa fuissent.”

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# MEMOIRS OF RACHEL.

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## CHAPTER I.

Parentage—Abraham Felix and Esther Haya—Characteristics of the Father reflected in the Daughter—Nomadic life—Birthplace, Early Childhood, and Pursuits.

WHENEVER it happens that an individual of low birth and obscure origin springs into notoriety by the power of genius, aided by fortuitous circumstances, the anecdote-mongers and scandal-purveyors of an insatiate public, stretch their inventive faculties to the utmost verge of probability, and even of possibility, in order to invest with all the hues of romance, the infancy of the child of fame. Denuded of these fanciful additions, the mere facts would, in the majority of cases, possess but little interest; nine out of ten of those whose genius and talent illustrate the age in which they live, and stamp on the indelible page of history the name of their possessor, have had as uninteresting and prosaic a childhood as

the host of their less gifted contemporaries. The interest we take in the early days of Rachel arises, not from her having been a street singer—we daily meet those little itinerant warblers or screechers without bestowing a thought on their past, present or future—but from her having subsequently attained pre-eminence in a far higher sphere. As for the thousand and one anecdotes that have been circulated of her former life, few are founded on reality, and even if we grant them all to be deserving of credit they are such as might find their counterpart in the lives of the common run of mortals.

The elements that afford an insight into the character, the feelings, the source of inspiration, the *modus-operandi* of the mind—these are the points that interest the judicious observer, these are the really valuable traits which we would record. Pruning the surcharged history of our heroine of all incidents not well authenticated, we still find sufficient to corroborate our estimate of this very singular and exceptional character, and in her parentage and the circumstances that developed her talents, a clue to much that otherwise would appear unexplainable.

The Felix family is of German-Rhenish origin, though Rachel's father, a Frenchman, was born in Metz. Abraham Felix studied in his youth with

the object of becoming a rabbi, but subsequently forsook sacred lore for an avocation suggested by necessity, and became a travelling pedlar. A man of a rather superior order of intellect, considering his position in society, and the few opportunities afforded him for its development, of sound judgment and strong mind, he has nevertheless been accused of displaying in his manners the vanity and self-sufficiency of the parvenu, and of being another instance of the fact, that whenever pecuniary interests are in question, the Jew blood is instantly on the alert, and justice and reason are unceremoniously sacrificed to the love of gain. He may be described as one of those men who, slow and methodical to a fault, and usually governed by good sense, are yet apt to give way to moments of anger, the fury of which is so ungovernable as to terrify the members of their households into a state of mute submission, until the storm subsides. Men who contradict, irritate, and worry the weak who are in their power, and, in so doing, lash themselves into the most unreasonable rages. This, however, in the case of Rachel's father, happened but seldom ; for, though severe, he was generally strictly just. Whatever might be the pride he felt in his daughter, he never joined with her mother, brother, and sisters,



in their silly and exaggerated encomiums of her talent. He never hesitated to blame openly what he did not approve, and his praise was the more valuable, from the caution with which it was bestowed. His taste and instinctive knowledge of dramatic art, would have done honor to a veteran stager, and to his judicious advice Rachel was perhaps indebted for much of her success. Indeed, she inherited from him so many of the most striking points of her character, that some knowledge of the father's is necessary to gain a clue to the daughter's.

Of Rachel's mother, Esther Haya Felix, it may be sufficient to say that she was a sensible, kind-hearted, and intelligent woman, who, though idolizing her children, never permitted the slightest disregard of her maternal authority. And one of the peculiar characteristics of this family—a characteristic especially rare in the present age of progress, when children are wiser than their fathers and consign respect to age among the rubbish of a bye-gone time—is the unbounded reverence with which, whatever the success that has attended their career, the younger members appear to have always regarded its heads. There is something very beautiful, and of a biblical character in the intercourse between the parents and the

children, which reminds one of scenes in the lives of the patriarchs.

But with these higher and finer traits—these bright dashes on the canvas of this Israelite tableau—are intermingled meaner and baser ones, the foul blotches inseparable from the race, and conspicuous wherever there is a drop of the blood, sordid littleness, petty vanity, and inordinate love of show. Though at heart a good woman, Madame Felix has been accused of carrying to a greater length than even her husband, the parvenu characteristics, and to have been too apt in matters of business to bring to her aid all the sharp, grasping, covetous nature of him who so artfully acquired his brother's birthright. In this particular, however else they may differ, the whole family have shown but too close a similarity.

But whilst the littleness and foibles of the Felix family are, as we have already said, distinctive attributes of their race, it must be owned that their great and good qualities are no less its appanage. Fortitude in adversity, perseverance in the pursuit of an object, religious reverence for family ties, and the *esprit de corps* that has sustained that race and maintained its existence through long centuries and amid

antagonistic nations, have endowed this scattered remnant of a once mighty people with the strength which they lack numerically, and enabled them to maintain their long-disputed footing amidst the peoples of Europe. These qualities are found unalloyed in the Felix family.

The marriage between the parents of Rachel was one of mutual affection; but the course of true love did not run smoother in their case than it does in the generality of instances, the elders long withholding their consent. At the end of two years the perseverance of the lovers triumphed and they were united. A numerous progeny was for a long time the only wealth of this constant couple. Born during the course of their mother's peregrinations, each child was the native of a different place. Several died in early childhood, and six reached adulthood. Of these, Sarah, Raphael, Leah, and Dinah still live, Rebecca died three years ago; and of the death of Rachel we shall have hereafter to make more particular mention. These biblical names proclaiming too plainly the race of the bearers, they were laid aside, and more common-place ones substituted. Sarah and Raphael alone kept theirs; the other children were known as Eliza, Rosalie, Charlotte,

and Emilia. When they subsequently came before the public, however, the prestige attached to uncommon names induced them to resume their original ones. On the day of her *débüt* Eliza appeared as Rachel, Rosalie afterwards came out as Rebecca, Charlotte was Leah, and Emilia Dinah. Even Madame Felix, who had Christianized herself so far as adopting the name of Sophia went, took the more euphonious one of Noemi.

Fortune long frowned on the Felix family. Pursuing from town to village, and from fair to fair, their precarious and toilsome career, earning with difficulty their uncertain daily bread, the parents, like the majority of itinerant Jews, carried on a variety of avocations, but had no regular trade or profession.

Sarah, the eldest child, was born in Germany, and in the very heart of the Jewish customs and traditions. Of all the family she is the most thorough Hebrew at heart.

Raphael was born in Macon, Rebecca in Lyons, and Dinah in Paris.

It was in a little wretched inn in Munf, (Canton of Aran, Switzerland), on the 24th of March, 1821, according to the best authenticated account, that the wife of the poor pedlar gave birth to the child who

was to be the source of wealth and prosperity to the whole family. We have given this place of birth, as we have said, from the best authenticated accounts; for, in reality, nothing can be found to designate with certainty the exact spot. All that remains to record the event, so unimportant to the world at that time, is an entry made by the burgomaster of Aran, mentioning that the wife of a pedlar had been confined of a female child, in the village of Munf. The entry bore no mention of family or religion. The birth was regularly recorded on no civil or religious register whatsoever.

Thus the great *tragédienne* of our age, she whose renown has been proclaimed in all Europe and confirmed in the New World, cannot boast of that which is the patrimony of the humblest and poorest child of the people—an act that proves her identity!

For ten successive years the family wandered throughout Switzerland and Germany, and during the course of this wearisome pilgrimage, the energy and perseverance with which the mother sought to conquer adverse fate were indefatigable. She finally succeeded in housing her numerous progeny in Lyons, where she opened a paltry little second-hand clothes shop.

While patient Esther bought and sold old clothes, her husband gave lessons in German. Sarah, the eldest child, went from one café to another singing, accompanied by her younger sister, Rachel, who collected the copper donations, and the children not unfrequently trundled between them, on a barrow, a third child; thus adding to the interest they excited and relieving their mother of the care of the baby for a short time.

## CHAPTER II.

1830 to 1837.

Paris—A Lucky Meeting—Mr. Choron—The Cours St. Aulaire  
 —Rachel at Thirteen—Narrative of *Salema*—An old  
 Umbrella for Racine — “Le Légataire Universel” —  
 Precocious Actress — The Conservatoire — Conflicting  
 Opinions—A Judge at Fault—Unfavorable Prognostics—  
 “Sell Bouquets, girl, Sell Bouquets”—An Important Rôle  
 —A Great Step in Life.

TOWARDS the year 1830 the Felix family found means to satisfy the craving desire that all provincials entertain to see the capital. They removed to Paris, and for some years continued there the life they led in Lyons.

Many and contradictory versions have been given of the circumstances that led to the cultivation and development of the tragic genius whose latent spark might, under less propitious ones, have been stifled at its birth. The following we can vouch for as having been the real origin of Rachel's fortunate career.

A gentleman of the name of Morin, who, at the present day, is employed in a government office, was one evening taking his cup of coffee in a café, rue de la Huchette, one of the poorest, lowest and meanest streets of a very poor, low and mean quarter of the town. Sarah was singing and Rachel was going the rounds of the tables, collecting contributions from the guests. Struck with the exceeding sweetness of the elder girl's voice—a voice possessing in an extraordinary degree the power of awakening a sympathetic chord in the heart of the listener—Mr. Morin called the singer to him and inquired why she did not find a way to make her voice more profitable than it was with her present mode of using it—a practice which, moreover, exposed her to numerous insults, and might result in her finally losing it.

The girl replied that she had no one to take an interest in or to counsel her how to act.

“Well,” said the gentleman, “here is my address; come to me to-morrow and I will give you a letter to a friend of mine who may be of great service to you.”

The girls went the next day to their new protector, who, true to his word, gave them a letter for Mr. Choron, then at the head of the Conserva-



toire of Sacred Music, rue Vangirad, 69. Choron heard Sarah sing, and immediately admitted her as a pupil. Then turning to Rachel, he said :

“ And what can you do, little one ? ”

“ I can recite verses,” was the reply.

“ Recite verses, can you ? Pray let me hear you.”

The child complied, and the correctness and feeling with which she uttered the pieces of her little repertory, were deemed remarkable by this competent judge, albeit the effect of the recitation was somewhat marred by the gruff tones of the voice. Both sisters were admitted into the Conservatoire, Rachel taking a place among the choristers.

By the advice of Mr. Choron, Rachel studied elocution, and was recommended by him to St. Aulaire, the manager of the Salle Génard, rue de Lancry, where pupils were taught gratuitously. Her sister Sarah also followed the Cours there. The talent innate in the younger sister must have been very apparent, for, unlike Sarah's, her voice was peculiarly grating and disagreeable in early youth, and for a long while seemed destined to prove an insuperable obstacle to success.

Nor was the exterior of the aspirant after histrionic laurels an auxiliary. Puny, meagre, wiry,

she appeared several years younger than she really was. The person from whom these particulars were obtained, and who, for years, never lost sight of the fortunate Jewess, gives a graphic description of her as she then appeared. It was in 1834, on a cold, grey November morning, Rachel was dressed in a short calico frock, the pattern of which was the common one of a red ground spotted with white; the trousers were of the same material; the boots of coarse black leather, laced in front but scrupulously polished. Her hair was parted at the back of the head, and hung down her shoulders in two braids. Everything about the child was of the cheapest and plainest kind, but the *ensemble* conveyed an idea of excessive neatness and even precision—characteristics for which she was always noted. With those older than herself little Rachel was punctiliously polite, and this manner proceeded more from intuitive knowledge of the propriety of such conduct than from lessons received. She was simple and grave beyond her years; every feature of the long childish face bearing an impress of modesty and even dignity, with which education had had little to do. With children of her own age she was pert, bold, and capricious, resembling rather a fantastic, tricky elf than the serious, formal little dame she appeared in older society.

The Cours was removed from the rue Lancry, and established momentarily in the Prado, opposite the Palais de Justice. It was here that Rachel's natural genius for tragedy was in reality first revealed. She recited the narrative of *Salema*, in the "Abufar," by Ducis, describing the agony of the mother who, while expiring of thirst in a desert, gives birth to her babe. While uttering the thrilling tale the thin face seemed to lengthen with horror, the small, deep-set black eyes dilated with a fixed stare, as though she witnessed the harrowing scene, and the deep guttural tones, despite a slight Jewish accent, awoke a nameless terror in the hearer, carrying him through the imaginary woe with a strange feeling of reality, not to be shaken off as long as the sounds lasted. To elicit thus the sympathetic attention of those who heard her was much, but yet more was needed to satisfy a public rendered fastidious by the remembrance of past excellence and the constant habit of seeing new candidates for its favours. The voice might be tolerated, as time was expected to smooth its discordant notes, but the public eye must also be satisfied, and until she attained nearly her full growth, Rachel's figure, all acute angles, resembled that of a half-starved monkey.

The school was finally removed to the Salle

Moliere in April, 1835, and here the system of teaching was somewhat changed. Theatricals were got up in which the pupils were the actors, each paying from one to ten francs for the privilege, according to the importance of the part undertaken. Sarah, who was supposed to be an especial favorite with the head of the academy, had her own way in all things, and the result was that her sister played any and every thing without paying. In fact, she learned indiscriminately any part that happened to be wanted, from one of the mutes that fill up the back ground to the most important personages in tragedy or comedy, without any reference to her peculiar disposition or aptness for any one branch of her art—points utterly unheeded by the teacher at the time. This indifference seemed justified by the insignificant appearance she then presented. Time seemed to pass over without noticing the scraggy little elf who, at fourteen, hardly looked to be nine. During three years she did not grow a line.

The following account of the first introduction of a well-known *feuilletonist* to the *tragédienne* in embryo, we borrow from the *Independence Belge*. Speaking of the little theatre where St. Aulair taught his pupils to appear with ease

and confidence before an audience, Mr. Villemot says:

“It was here that, in 1835, I saw for the first time her who was to win such celebrity. One of my friends, a young man of good family, and who now occupies the post of French Consul abroad, was possessed with a passion for private theatricals. All his leisure hours and all his spare money he spent in this darling pursuit, and I was one day invited with great solemnity to witness his performance of the part of *Danville* in the “*Ecole des Vieillards*.” When we entered the theatre, my friend stopped before a column on which was a smoky lamp, and against which was leaning a meagre, black, scraggy, poverty-stricken little girl, of an aspect more wretched than I can describe. ‘Eliza,’ quoth the amateur comedian to this child, ‘which would you rather have, a cake or fried potatoes?’ ‘Fried potatoes,’ was the reply.

“My friend, who in playing great characters had acquired habits of reckless prodigality, drew from his pocket a two-sous piece. Seized with a spirit of emulation, I bestowed a similar coin. The child disappeared and returned almost immediately bearing a paper horn full of fried potatoes, temptingly hot and brown. She offered the horn

to her benefactors, and this was the only time I ever partook of a meal with Mademoiselle Rachel. Young Eliza was to appear in an after-piece—I do not know what one, or in what part. I did not see her: my friend had made such poor work of the part of Danville, I had had quite enough of it. Going home, I inquired of my friend who was that miserable little thing. ‘That,’ said he, ‘is a very intelligent, but very poor child, as you see. You, who are acquainted with authors and managers, might perhaps get her employment in some theatre to play childish parts; you would thus do her a great favour.’

“But people are not apt to interest themselves in meagre, dark, wretched-looking children, even when they are gifted with intelligence, and the amateur’s recommendation was not in the present case more successful than such efforts usually are. When Rachel was no longer in need of assistance, it would have been joyfully proffered.”

Rachel thus continued to spend, or rather to waste her time, playing once a week, until the year 1836. About this epoch Mr. de St. Aulaire who rather liked his little pupil, introduced her to some of the actors of the different theatres who, now and then, came to witness the performances of these embryo actresses. Among these visitors

was Monval, an actor of the Gymnase, of mediocre ability as an actor, but of deserved reputation as stage manager of that theatre. Monval was among those who took note of the peculiar excellence of little Rachel's style of acting—an excellence unfortunately cast into the shade by the too apparent disadvantages of her form.

On the 20th of March of that year the Conservatoire de Musique re-opened its classes of declamation, and Sanson, Michelot, and Provost were appointed professors. Many of St. Aulaire's pupils deserted him for the Conservatoire, and Rachel was advised to do the same. Ties of gratitude however, bound the little Jewess to the professor who had been so kind to her, and she could not decently leave him for the more favored institution that had eclipsed his. At the end of three or four months nearly all the pupils of the Salle Moliere had left; seduced not only by the rumour of the brilliancy of style acquired at the Conservatoire, but by a still more potent consideration—at the public institution no expense was incurred by the pupils; at St. Aulaire's a monthly sum of two francs was paid by each towards defraying the expenses of the rooms. However small this sum may seem it was one of importance to many of the contributors. As

Rachel, however, paid nothing, this consideration could not influence her and counterbalance gratitude ; how far the latter feeling would have conquered had the case been otherwise it is hard to say.

An incident related by herself proves both how strong was the vocation of the child and how poor were her circumstances at the time. She owned an old volume of Racine and longed to become the fortunate possessor of another.

She had seen just the book she coveted in one of the collections of old books displayed for sale on the quays, but the franc needed for the purchase was a sum far beyond her means. The temptation at last overpowered all other considerations ; she went to a dealer in second hand articles, sold him an old umbrella, with which she went back, and forth to the Cours, and bought the volume with the twenty sous she had thus obtained. At home she accounted for the umbrella by saying she had lost it.

One Sunday, Sanson, then at the height of his reputation, came to St. Aulaire's to see one of his pupils act *Lisette* in the 'Legataire Universel, a play in which there is an incidental part. In the second act old Géroute, who intends committing matrimony, receives a call from his apothecary



cary, a fiery little bantam, married to a second wife, and who, having had a family of fourteen children by the first spouse, confidently hopes that the second may prove as prolific. He calls for the purpose of entering a violent protest against his customer's connubial intentions, and, after an explosion of wrath, goes off in a fury, prognosticating all the ills imaginable to the doomed patient. This part is generally played by a child, but though the size of the personage is thus represented, the *rôle* loses sadly in other respects. On this occasion it fell to Rachel, whose figure it exactly suited, her very defects proving serviceable qualities in this instance. Here, too, her sharp, rough tones, her naturally tragic delivery, her energetic bursts of fury enabled her to do ample justice to the part, and elicited much applause. Sanson warmly urged her to join the Cours of the Conservatoire, and interest and ambition predominating over gratitude, she took the advice of her new acquaintance. Having passed her examination she was admitted, notwithstanding her dwarf figure.

She reaped little advantage from the change of quarters. She attracted little notice from the professors, her voice militating greatly against her, while her size seemed to condemn her to

inaction. Michelot pronounced that her voice might eventually render her suited for tragic parts, but that her size would be an objection. Provost averred that her slender proportions might enable her to play the *Soubrettes* of comedy, but that her voice totally precluded her so doing. Notwithstanding this, he caused her to learn Lisette in the "*Folies Amoureuses*" by Regnard. Sanson refrained from expressing his opinion. On the following Saturday Provost heard her repeat her part, and, according to custom, was exceedingly harsh and violent with her. This was, in fact, his manner with all his pupils. He entered so completely into the spirit of the part, that he did not pause to consider that all were not imbued with his conception of it, and in consequence of this arbitrary view any deviation was visited with merciless severity. Rachel was snubbed, scolded and brow-beaten like the rest, with the additional comment that *she had the voice of a costermonger*. "Go child, go sell bouquets; that's all you will ever be fit for," was the comforting finale of the professor's lecture.

Some months after this stormy lesson, the derided pupil had an opportunity to remind the false prophet of his disheartening predictions. She had played "*Hermione*" to an enthusiastic

public and been greeted with a shower of bouquets. When the curtain fell, gathering her trophies in the skirt of her Grecian tunic, she approached Provost who was behind the scenes, and kneeling with mock humility, said :

“ Sir, you once advised me to sell bouquets; will you now be my first customer.”

Provost gracefully admitted his error, adding that none could rejoice more sincerely than himself in the falseness of his prophecy.

But that day of triumph was still distant, and in the meanwhile the poor girl, who was even at that age obliged to have her tonsils cut, retired heart-stricken and despairing. This scene took place in the beginning of the year 1837, at which time the pupils were rehearsing “*Tartufe*.” To Rachael fell the part of *Flipotte*! That, after ten years of study, she should only be deemed worthy to receive, with speechless resignation, the box on the ear from the irascible Madame Pernelle, was an insult too great to be tolerated, and the hitherto patient and docile girl forsook the Conservatoire and sought the advice of her old friend St. Aulaire, whom she begged to procure her employment in some theatre where she could earn a trifle. St. Aulaire spoke on the subject to Monval who, having heard her, re-

commended her to his manager, Mr. Poirson. Mr. Poirson liked singular and eccentric persons, and hearing that the girl was a very odd little thing, engaged her, at the—to her—very high salary of 3000 francs for three years. Her abilities having been gauged, a piece in two acts called “La Vendéene” was written by Paul Duport for her *débüt*.

## CHAPTER III.

1837.

The Gymnase—La Vendéenne—The First Criticism—Jules Janin—Bouffé—An Odd Little Thing—Jewish *Esprit de Corps*—Rachel and Sanson.

THUS she who probably even then aspired to tread the classical highway to the temple of Fame, set out by turning her back on the Greek and Roman deities to enter the narrow lane of the Vaudeville drama. However, it was still a beginning, and, in her situation, an un-hoped-for piece of good luck. Of this *débât*, which took place on the 24th of April, 1837, a dramatic author of some reputation, Mr. G. Rurat de Gurgy, condescended to give the following notice :

“Mademoiselle Rachel Felix, who is quite a young person, will, in the course of time, prove

herself possessed of one of the finest dramatic organisations we have yet seen. Her voice is grave and penetrating, and in moments of passion its tones soften and seem full of tears. The success of Mademoiselle Felix has exceeded, if possible, that of the "Vendéenne," which had been so arranged as to give full scope to the precocious powers of the *débutante*. She was recalled and applauded several times. The Theatre of the Gymnase will renew with this young actress the bright days of Mademoiselle Léontine Fry. The continuation of Mademoiselle Rachel's *débûts* has not ceased to be happy, and we are more than ever disposed to believe in the fair horoscope that is drawn for her by all who witness her performances. Good plays make the reputation of actresses, and good actresses ensure success to plays."

The above opinion could not, *certainly*, at the time it was written be accused of partiality, or of having emanated from party feeling. It was as sincere as it was just, and its favorable prognostics have since been fulfilled.

Though the ground work of the drama of "La Vendéenne," and its most pathetic scenes, are openly borrowed from the well-known novel of the "Heart of Mid Lothian," it possessed all

the interest of a new story. The poor girl who, alone, unprotected, sustained only by her affection, travels from a distant province up to Court, to implore mercy for a sister or a father, as the case may be, must necessarily prove interesting. The plot is very simple. General Fresnault is sent to pacify "La Vendée." The general, though kind-hearted and desirous of sparing the Vendéens, is devoted heart and soul to the First Consul, and is a strict disciplinarian. On one occasion an order is despatched from the Court for the arrest and delivery to a court-martial of a certain Vendéen peasant of the name of Thibault. The order is brought by a young and elegant captain, an *aide-de-camp* of General Bonaparte, a cousin of Josephine's, a sort of pet at the Malmaison. When Victor delivers his fatal missive there is in the room a young girl, into whose heart the tidings strike despair, for Thibault is her father. The paroxysm of grief of the fair Geneviève moves the gay young officer to disregard even a peremptory duty; come what will she shall have time to implore mercy for her father. To afford her this time he has but one resource—he throws the order in the fire.

From the Vendéenne's cottage, where the

first act passes, the second carries us into the gardens of the Malmaison, where we find the lovely and gentle mistress also a prey to anxiety for the safety of him she loves. George Cadondal has been again busy, and a plan had very recently been laid, and well-nigh carried into execution, for the seizure and sending captive into England of the First Consul. The discovery of this plot has exasperated its proposed victim. The time is ill chosen for the petition of Victor's *protegeé*. He himself has just arrived, and obtained an audience of Josephine. His cousin reproaches him for his imprudence. "Good Heavens! he has destroyed one of Bonaparte's despatches; he has saved one of George Cadondal's friends! You have deserved death, young madman! You will certainly be shot! Fly! Victor, fly!"

Alas, the advice of the compassionate Josephine comes too late, for the imprudent captain is then and there arrested.

In the meanwhile, little Geneviève arrives at the chateau. She has walked a long way; she is weary and foot-sore, and now that she has reached the goal, everything fails her at once,—her protector, Victor, hope and courage. The child, thus left to her own resources, sinks, faint and despairing, in a corner of the Empress' *salon*. We may



well say the Empress now, for on this very day the First Consul has resolved to exchange the life consulship for a royal, imperial, hereditary and perpetual majesty. While Josephine, thus raised to the height of honors, gives vent to her exultation, she hears the broken sobs of the disconsolate child. The Empress turns her head, and Geneviève is at her feet. Here begins the scene on which hangs the fate of the chief *dramatis personæ*, that of the play itself, and the success of the *débutante*. The *finale* is easily guessed. The Emperor inaugurates his reign by an act of clemency. So fair a day must be darkened by no cloud,—the captain and the Vendéen chief are given.

The young actress had dressed the piece with strict attention; the garb was the coarse one of the Vendéenne peasant-girl, and certainly not calculated to conceal defects or set off beauty in the wearer, yet the illusion was complete. There were two stanzas in her part, which, instead of singing, she *chaunted*, with the strangely moving intonations, the *melopœia* which ten years later were to prove so effective in the "Marseillaise," on the boards of the Théâtre Français. It was evident that hers was no voice for singing, yet she threw such feeling into the stanzas that it compen-

sated the lack of vocal powers. The following verse was the most applauded:

"Je crovais encore l'invoquer;  
Vers moi soudain elle s'avance,  
Et du doigt semble m'indiquer  
Une ville inconnue immense,  
Un seul mot rompit le silence  
'Paris!' et puis elle ajouta,  
Comme en réponse à ma prière,  
'Vas y seule à pied—car c'est là  
Que tu pourras sauver ton père.'"

At the rehearsal, Bouffé, who was present, was much struck with the singular mixture of strange qualities the *débutante* presented,—a union of the sublime and the grotesque,—a casket, rough-hewn and unpolished, through which gleamed a priceless gem. An undefined sense of something grand lurking beneath that unpropitiating exterior, pervaded the minds of the spectators, who almost refrained from expressing an admiration they could not satisfactorily explain to themselves. Bouffé had never heard of her, and the *big* voice, the scraggy figure, the unaffected, simple intonation, the calm, quiet dignity, beneath which lay an extraordinary depth of passion, impressed him strangely.

"What on odd little girl!" said he, "there is something in her, *certainly*, but her place is not here."

A far more important critic than the preceding one also gave his opinion of the play and of the actress. The *feuilleton* of the *Débats*, of May 1st, 1837, contained the following :

“ The little drama (‘ La Vendéenne ’) is simply but clearly written. The empire and La Vendée, the republic and the monarchy, all parties and all persons, are handled with such tact as to give offence to none, and numerous stumbling-blocks nicely avoided. But the production of a drama was not the sole object the author had in view,—the success of his heroine was to entail the success of a new comer on the stage, a child of scarcely fifteen summers, of the name of Rachel. This child, thank Heaven, is not a phenomenon, and will never be cried up as a wonder. Rachel has soul, heart, intellect, and very little skill. She possesses an intuitive perception of the feeling she is to express, and her intellect suffices to understand it. She needs lessons and advice from no one. In her acting there is no effort, no exaggeration ; she utters no screams, makes no gestures ; there is nothing like coquetry in her countenance or manners, on the contrary, there is something abrupt, bold and savage in the attitude, walk and look,—such is Rachel. This

child, whose instinct tells her what is truth in art, dresses with scrupulous attention to local costumes; her voice is harsh and untutored like that of a child; her hands are red like those of a child; her foot, like her hand, is scarcely shaped yet; she is not pretty, yet she pleases; in a word, there is a great future in this young talent, and for the present she excites tears, emotion and interest.

The above judgment is curious inasmuch as, though on the whole very favorable to Rachel, it contains a sentence wholly and positively contradicted by the writer himself within a twelvemonth after—namely, that Rachel was *not a phenomenon and would never be cried up as a wonder*. The *Constitutionnel*, of May 1st, also, though less favorable to the play, was quite as much so to the precocious talent of the actress. Beyond a few words of praise in the *Débats*, of May 22nd, no further notice was taken of the *débutante* for many months. Her very existence seemed forgotten by the press.

The Jewish *esprit de corps* shone conspicuously on the occasion of the *débüt* of a co-religionist. Her father's traffic, station and circumstances threw him altogether into one class of his people, and that class, by no means the highest, came forth

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*en masse* to sustain the *neophyte*. The *gods* were on that occasion all Jews. All the cheap seats were crammed with the chosen people. The "Vendéenne" was acted sixty times in succession, but the treasury was not much benefitted by the influx of Israelites, as the galleries and pit alone were filled. The vanity of the Felix family was, however, amply gratified, for these numerous supporters tributed applause, which, if not always very judicious, was loud, lusty and prolonged *ad infinitum*.

Notwithstanding this apparent success, Rachel was found by the manager a more difficult commodity to dispose of than he had imagined. His was not the stage for her peculiar style. Scribe's little comedies, with their prettiness and littleness, were totally unsuited to the manner of young Rachel,—a manner simple, serious, verging already on the sublime; and the voice was utterly at variance with the pert, roguish manner of the *soubrette*. Finally he entrusted her with the rôle of *Susanne*, in the "Marriage de Raison,"—a rôle created by Léontine Fay, afterwards Madame Volnys, who was then at the Théâtre Français. Rachel, anxious to improve, went to Madame Volnys and begged she would give her the benefit of her advice in learning a part in which she her-

self had obtained such eminent success. Madame Volnys kindly complied, but her tutoring did no good to Rachel, whose sterling and original talent could not bend to adopt the empty, rapid style of Léontine. She made her second *débüt* in this part on the 18th of June. The success obtained continued to be a negative one, and the cheap seats to be invaded by the descendants of Jacob.

By this time it had become evident to all, that the national tragic arena was the only one where the powers of Rachel could find scope for full development. She was now sixteen, and, as though nature had awaited the hour of her *débüt* to join with fortune in showering favors on their gifted child, within a few months of that auspicious era in her life the dwarfish figure had, we will not say *grown*, for the word scarce gives an idea of the change—elongated several inches! She applied to her former professor, Sanson, who procured her an engagement at the Théâtre Français, for the first tragic parts, at a salary of 4000fr. per year. Mr. Poirson, convinced of her unfitness for his stage, kindly cancelled her engagement with him.

From that day forth, Sanson took great interest in Rachel, and labored diligently to impart to her the qualities for which he himself was eminent—clearness and simplicity of style, purity of diction.

He revealed her powers to the diligent pupil, and opened a new sphere to her soaring spirit. The following anecdote, told by one who had it from the lips of his pupil, proves that Sanson saw the germ of the bright future that was in store for her. Before her engagement at the Théâtre Français, of which she was destined to prove the restorer and chief stay, he gave her two seats for some performance he was anxious she should witness. Overjoyed at the prospect of the treat, the girl donned her best apparel—her best was not very brilliant—and was at the doors with her mother at an early hour. Looking disdainfully at the mean bonnets, coarse plaid shawls, and clogs, that were to be inducted into the best and most conspicuous places in the house :

“ Here,” quoth the ticket-taker, “ you’re not fit to be seen in those seats, take these, they are quite good enough.”

Rachel was inclined to throw back the tickets, thus unceremoniously exchanged for hers, but the wish to see the play triumphed over pride, and she accepted the back seats at the top of the house.

When Sanson heard of the disrespect shown to his pupil, he was exceedingly angry with the *contrôleur*.

“The little girl you have treated so rudely,” said he, “will one day have influence enough to dispose of your place at her will, she will one day give the law in the house you would have turned her out of.”

Indeed, so much did Rachel profit by the untiring lessons of this excellent teacher, that her detractors have thence taken occasion to say, that without him she would never have attained her high eminence in art. They have asserted that Rachel was, after all, but an echo of her professors—a clear, sonorous, magnificent echo, certainly, but still only an echo.

It would be absurd to assert that the splendid terrors of that queenly brow, the impassioned accents of those eloquent lips, now full of piercing irony, now quivering with suppressed rage, are due to mechanical precision, to careful imitation. No, the deniers of her genius dare not go so far; they allow that she understands the scope and design of that which she so readily executes, but they will not allow that her conception is innate. They explain her extraordinary performance by her wonderful memory, and insist that she is entirely indebted to her power of retaining and classifying in systematic order, the different *effects* that have been pointed out to her, using them



with accurate precision just where they are required. To use the words of one of these *iconoclasts*, she should be regarded only as an instrument, but an instrument gifted with a soul which, in the absence of the skilful hand that draws forth its sweetness, re-echoes the harmonious note that hand had once awakened. They averred that alone and unaided, she was wholly destitute of creative power, and like a diamond lost in the darkness, that awaits a foreign light to throw forth its own rays. The most incredulous of these sceptics allowed, however, that she possessed a wonderful organisation of the larynx, and attributed to it the transcendant effects she produced. In proof of this incapacity to create, they alleged that every new part she appeared in had been carefully, indefatigably conned over with Sanson, line by line, word by word, from the first to the last verse; every attitude, gesture, and intonation, studied, weighed and regulated, the hand of art guiding this fine but nearly blind intelligence.

All this may in a measure be true; but, that Rachael had immense native genius is no less so; and the fact that art had to be called in to guide and maintain it in the true road, that the lessons of wisdom and experience were needed to curb its erratic propensities within the bounds of nature,

does not at all gainsay its existence. Were her success entirely attributable to her professor, she would not stand alone on the height to which she has risen, for very many indeed have been pupils of the same master, and among them we discern but one Rachel.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE DEBUTS OF MADEMOISELLE RACHEL IN  
ALL HER CLASSICAL RÔLES.

1838 &amp; 1839.

The Théâtre Français—Three Months of Negative Success—  
“Camille”—“Hermione”—“Emilie”—An Unknown  
Admirer—Doctor Véron—Appearance of Rachel at that  
Time—The Prince of Critics—A less Enthusiastic Admirer  
—Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Titus, and Berénice, in  
brocade, flowing wigs and small swords.

THE first appearance of Rachel on the classic boards of the Théâtre Français was in the part of *Camille*, on the 12th of June, 1838. The heat was excessive; all town was out of town; the boxes were empty; the pit and galleries as usual filled with Jews, who had, in behalf of Rachel, made the theatre their place of rendezvous. Her success with that audience was complete, although surpassed by that which Joanny, who played old *Horace*, obtained. Her second *début* was in the

*Emilie* of "Cinna," on the 16th; the third in the *Hermione* of "Andromaque" on the 9th of July. When she uttered the ironical passage of the 4th act, beginning

"Seigneur, dans cette avenu dépourvu d'artifice," &c.

the applause was immense, though still tributed by the pit and galleries only. The receipts of the house suffice to show its emptiness: on the first night that Rachel played in the "Horaces," that is on the night of her first *début*, the amount taken was fr. 753.05; "Cinna" brought fr. 558.80 "Andromaque," fr. 373.20. And yet, within five months from that time, on the sixth occasion that she played "Camille," on the 10th of November of the same year, the receipts amounted to fr. 6,124.25 c.!

In this dearth of competent judges that attended the advent of her who was to ensure a brilliant though transitory resurrection to the muse of classical tragedy, we must record one exception—an exception that was not without its influence. This was Doctor Véron, the self-elected Mæcenæ of the young French *litterateurs*. We will give, in the doctor's own words, the impression then made on his very sensitive and enthusiastic organization, by her who was predestined to make

so deep a one on his heart. The commencement is in the approved style of romance.

“On a fine summer evening—June 12th, 1838—in my search after shade and solitude—shade and solitude may be found even in Paris by him who seeketh diligently—I entered the Théâtre Français. It was about eight o’clock, and I constituted the fifth person in the orchestra seats. My attention was drawn to the stage by a strange and exceedingly expressive countenance, a prominent brow, a dark eye, deep set and full of fire; this head was set on a figure which, though thin, was not devoid of a certain elegance of attitude, motion and gesture. A voice clear, sympathetic, finely toned and, above all, cleverly managed, roused my mind which, at that moment, was more inclined to indolence than to admiration.” With the exception of the eyes, which are not at all “full of fire,” but on the contrary resemble two dead-black spots of ink, under the cavernous brows, the description was accurate. The doctor, diving into the depths of his memory, then recalls a confused vision of that singular countenance, seen in the rôle of “La Vendéene” at the Gymnase; he remembers a young girl, meanly dressed and coarsely shod, who being questioned before him in the green-room as to what she did there,

replied, much to his surprise, in a deep bass voice :  
"I am pursuing my studies."

The susceptible doctor, who acknowledges that with him there is no middle course between admiration and abhorrence, became from that evening a passionate admirer of Mademoiselle Rachel, whom he already pronounced *a little prodigy*. "When," said he to a friend, whom he was endeavoring to inoculate with his ardent enthusiasm, "the twelve or fifteen hundred men of wit, who constitute public opinion in Paris, shall have heard and appreciated her, that child will be the glory and fortune of 'la Comédie Française.'"

Three months elapsed, during which the *débütante* acted in succession all the stock pieces and acquired the stage practice she might have lacked hitherto ; but from the 12th of June to the 9th of September not a word was said of her in the *Débats* that had been once so loud in her praise. Jules Janin, who held the sceptre of criticism in that paper, was absent from Paris, and in the interim it was wielded by Frédéric Soulié, the most noted opponent of classic tragedy, and who, therefore, could see no merit in the interpreter of Corneille and Racine.

Meanwhile the autumn was approaching, and the theatre-going public began to return to the

capital. Jules Janin, who had been spending some time in Italy, made his appearance in the beginning of September. To the inquiries of his friends as to what he had seen he answered, somewhat in the style of Sir Charles Coldstream in "Used up;" "Nothing worth mentioning; Rome, Naples, Baia, Pompeia, the old shades of antiquity. And what have you got new in Paris?" "Nothing," was the reply, "unless it be a little *débutante* at the Théâtre Français—an odd little mortal who makes a singular impression. If you have nothing better to do, go and see the little wretch; though she is a perfect fright, it is worth your while to see her once."

The sentence thus lightly passed on Rachel's outward appearance was exceedingly unjust, for though at that time she was no beauty, and from a distance was seen at great disadvantage, she was far from ugly. The features were too delicate for stage effect, their peculiar charm being lost on the spectators unless within a few paces. The coal-black eyes, under the influence of intense passion, seemed to retreat under the jutting forehead, and were then supposed to be very small. Her greatest deficiency at that epoch was in her figure, which, under the pressure of sudden growth, had lengthened without having

as yet acquired fulness and roundness of contour. There remained none of the angularity and scragginess of former days, while habit of the stage had imparted grace and ease. She resembled a frail reed ready to bend at the slightest breath.

The omnipotent critic finally consented to waste an hour in hearing the "*little fright*." At the end of the first act he had allowed that "there was something very extraordinary in the girl." At the close of the second he was in a perfect transport of admiration. "You ask me," he exclaimed, "what wonders I have seen in Italy, where everything has been described scores of times ; and you tell me there is nothing in Paris worth seeing, where, in truth, you have a new and perfect wonder ! I went abroad to find antiquity dead and crumbling into dust ; I return here to find it full of life and soul, embodied in yonder frail reed ! &c., &c., &c." On the following Monday the *feuilleton* of the *Debats*, redolent with enthusiasm from beginning to end, revealed to the world the wondrous creature whose existence it had hitherto ignored. Eight days after, the receipts began to tell in the treasury of the Théâtre Français ; within a fortnight, the fashionable absentees were hastily quitting their chateaux to witness in Paris the dramatic



revolution operated by the young Jewess. Without seeking to detract from merit too universally acknowledged not to be real, it must be owned that so sudden a triumph was more the work of what in France is emphatically denominated *La Clique*, than the result of that merit. To Jules Janin belongs the credit of having in the space of a week turned the tide of fortune and placed this new idol on the pedestal. She might in time have climbed alone, but by him she was lifted there at once.

Mr. Granier de Cassagnac was at this time publishing in "La Presse," a series of highly interesting and curious articles on the Classic Drama, in which he emitted, supporting them with admirable reasons, the most extraordinary opinions. Among his Quixotic attempts, was one which, had it succeeded, would have completely reversed the *mise en scene* now adopted: the talented critic insisted that the tragedies of Racine and Corneille should be brought on the stage with the costumes in vogue at the time they were written; that Achilles and Julius Cæsar should appear in flowing wig and small sword, doublet and hose; and Andromaque and Bérénice, in the brocade gowns of the reign of Louis XIV. He held the Greek and Roman dresses designed by David, and first intro-

duced by Talma, to be perfectly absurd, ridiculous, and out of place, especially those of the Roman women.

“Can anything,” he exclaims, “be less picturesque than that immense woolen or muslin cocoon, with a woman in the midst whose feet, and even whose hands, are invisible? Besides, the dress of the Romans underwent changes, and in the reign of Tiberius, the Greek fashions were adopted for furniture as well as for garments. Sumptuary laws also regulated the dress of magistrates and citizens, of men and of women, and prescribed different forms and colors, according to the age, the functions, and rank of the wearer. An actor is not dressed in character as a Roman merely because his legs are bare, his hair cut short, and that he wears a few yards of flannel on his back.”

Though the arguments of Mr. Granier de Cassagnac caused no revolution in modern theatricals, his opinion on the talent and abilities of actors had equal weight with that of the eloquent partisan of the antagonistic school, nor did he withhold the meed of his praise from the young *débütante*. His praise was much less enthusiastic than that of Jules Janin, but no less valuable; and though at times tempered even to frigidity by

the predilections of the critic for the modern school of drama, it was accompanied by most judicious suggestions. His commendations and strictures may be gathered from the following specimens.

“That which in our opinion particularises Mademoiselle Rachel, is, that her enunciation is simple, pure, and sustained. Each word falls distinctly and harmoniously on the ear, without the loss of a syllable. The gesture naturally accords with the voice. A noble elocution is always accompanied by a dignified motion, and when the lips mumble, the arms are equally faulty in their action.

“As for saying that Mademoiselle Rachel is a prodigy, that we cannot do. She acts well one scene out of three, and that is in itself a great deal. In her manner there is evidently much that is her own, and that is good; but she has also many faults which she has acquired from others. She as yet bawls too much, stamps too much, and goes in and out too sharply—all faults for which she is indebted to her venerable teachers of traditional acting. It is clear that much of her play is the second edition of Mr. Sanson’s.”—*Feuilleton de la Presse*, September 23, 1838.

## CHAPTER V.

Enthusiasm of the Public—Louis Philippe and Rachel—Royal Munificence in Past and Present Times—An Increase of Salary—System of Starring and its Ill Effects—*Monime*—Behind the Curtains; La Rue Traversière — A Step Upwards in Private Life—Peace Broken between the *Sociétaires* and the Pet of the Public—*Bajazet*; a Critical Moment—Reminiscences of Mademoiselle Mars—Artistic Magnanimity and Vanity.

WHILE severe critics thus deliberately weighed the merits and demerits of the artiste and her style of acting, the effect of that style on the public was electric, and few paused to analyse causes or cavil at details. The enthusiasm excited by Rachel repeatedly found an eloquent interpreter in Jules Janin: "This poor child, pale, slender and ill-fed, on whom ancient tragedy leans like blind and bloody Œdipus on Antigone, alone suffices to bring crowds to the lately deserted Théâtre Français. . . . The task of resuscitating this glorious body; of recalling the illustrious exiles; of cleaning the Augean stables of their literary

rubbish ; of restoring life, thought, motion, passion, interest to the imperishable masterpieces that, for lack of an interpreter, for lack of that spark of sacred fire which emanates from the soul and lights the glance, were dying ; this was indeed an immense task ; and when we reflect that it is undertaken by a child, ignorant of the things of this world, who knows nothing either of poetry, of history, of the passions she delineates, or even of the language she speaks, we admire and wonder, and we ask how it is that a task deemed impracticable should have been accomplished with such apparent ease and by so weak an instrument. The reason is that this child possesses that which is superior to science—inspiration. She brought with her at her birth the something divine, *mens divinator*, that feeds poetry. Her very ignorance was of more use to her than study ; had she realized the extent of her undertaking, how thick was the layer of ashes that concealed the spark she was to reanimate with her breath, had she known how dead was the corpse to which she was uniting her timid and sickly sixteenth year, she would, *certes*, have recoiled, and forsaken the work.

Fortunately she saw not the danger, she rushed into it with dauntless brow, she put her trust in the great masters whom none of those

around her trusted; she did not despair of the masterpieces insulted by the present generation; her very boldness carried her through; her faith saved her, her natural good sense preserved her from all declamation. She had conquered her domain; she had done more than conquer it, she had discovered it and now reigned there a sovereign."

We have left behind us the trials and vicissitudes of Rachel's early youth, and the succeeding pages record an uninterrupted series of triumphs, varied only by pleasing incidents in public life, and by no very severe heartaches in the private circle.

On the 1st of October, 1838, the theatre, completely crammed—every seat having been taken beforehand—drew between 5 and 6,000 francs. The triumphant days of Talma and Melle Mars, when at the zenith of their fame, were even equalled. The princes of the house of Orleans all came in succession to see the phenomenon. The duchess testified her approbation by the gift of a bracelet—a gold chain clasped by a cushion bearing a dog. This simple gift would, a few years later, have appeared to the spoiled actress but a poor token; but it was then a great thing for her, the rather too as it was not customary

for the family then on the throne to take any notice of *débutantes*. The sovereign himself, who never went to any theatre, honored the star by going to see her in the part of *Emilie* in "Cinna." A judicious friend took care that the king should meet the heroine as he passed out. His Majesty, taking her trembling hand in his, assured her very kindly that he had been much pleased with her performance and would be glad to see her again. Bashful and confused in attempting to express her gratitude, Mademoiselle Rachel addressed the king as *Monsieur*. When subsequently reminded of her mistake by her companion, Madame Tousez, she merrily excused it, saying, that she was so accustomed to converse with the Greek and Roman monarchs, she had neglected to learn how to speak to those of modern date.

During preceding reigns, an actress whose performance had attracted the notice and received the approbation of royalty would have been honored with magnificent testimonials of that approbation. From the gracious Marie Antoinette she would have received several costly dresses, to which Madame Adelaide (the daughter of Louis XV.) would have added a set of jewels. The generous Josephine would have sent, through one of her

chamberlains, a magnificent tiara; Queen Hortense, an Indian shawl; and, *certes*, the Emperor Napoleon would not have failed to send a page bearing a present gift of five hundred louis, and a deed of pension of, at least, six thousand francs. We have recorded the simple offering of the Duchess of Orleans. On the day after the king's visit to the theatre, a footman in the royal livery brought Mademoiselle Rachel a present of one thousand francs from his Majesty. Times were changed; the court of the citizen king was less lavish or less rich than that of his predecessors on the throne, and the royal gift was held to be munificent; it was, moreover, the first that had been bestowed on an actor or actress, since the advent of Louis Philippe.

Great, indeed, must have been the astonishment of Rachel herself at this unexpected and extraordinary success. It was not as though she had won the favor of an intelligent public at her first appearance. She had been playing for months with the negative success resulting from the applause of the herd of low, and unappreciating co-religionists, who had encouraged her more from *esprit de corps* than real admiration, and she found herself transferred suddenly into another sphere, and receiving the homage and



plaudits of the most refined, difficult, and exacting audience in the world.

On the 1st of October her engagement of three years at 4000fr. per annum, was voluntarily cancelled by the grateful committee of management, and renewed at the rate of 8000fr. per annum. Until the year 1840, this was deemed enormous, as the extravagant salaries now paid to favorite artists had never yet been heard of, and the system of starring and the exacting demands of those petted autocrats were unknown. The invention belongs exclusively to the English and Americans, and has proved a baneful one to both the public and the managers. Art itself has been a loser by this pitiful system of attracting and concentrating the attention of the public on one person at the expense of all the other actors, who are depressed and impoverished in order that one lucky individual may be enriched and spoiled. The result is the ruin of managers, the failure of enterprise, and the death of art, which lives not by one, but by all.

Shortly after, "Mithridates" was revived for Rachel who, in the part of *Monime*, elicited new bursts of admiration. The committee presented her with its first gift, consisting of all the plays in which she had appeared, each separately and

splendidly bound, with her name and the date of her first performance in the part, inscribed in golden letters on the back. Shortly after, the committee presented to the gentle and sublime Monime a tiara of gold and precious stones, thus splendidly recording the triumph of the queen even when she falls in the snare laid for her by the wily king of Pontus.

Though the public thus graciously received Mademoiselle Rachel's *Monime*, critics were not unanimous in its praise, and Granier de Cassagnac was particularly severe: " '*Mithridates was ridiculously played*' . . . . '*Mademoiselle Rachel uttered fifteen lines decently, and all the rest of the part in the coldest and most colorless manner.*'"—*Feuilleton* of "*La Presse*," October, 7, 1838.

While one of the writers of "*La Presse*" thus sweepingly anathematized the style of the actress, another, and one of no little influence in the literary world, was as extreme in commendations. The *feuilleton* of the 18th December, signed by the *Vicomte de Launay*, the pseudonym of the gifted wife of the editor, extols the talent of Mademoiselle Rachel in extravagant terms. The enthusiasm, however, finds an explanation in the *feuilleton* of the 29th, signed by the same *nom de*

*plume*: "Mademoiselle Rachel was last Tuesday sublime in 'Bajazet.' The progress she makes is marvellous. Among the *on dits* it is rumoured that Madame Emile de Girardin has just finished a tragedy entitled 'Judith,' written expressly for Mademoiselle Rachel."

At this stage of her successful career Rachel was living at No. 37, rue Traversière St. Honoré, a street since called rue de la Fontaine Molière, and the contrast presented by her public and private life was curious enough. At home she, who in the part of a tragic princess had, some hours before, been deluged with bouquets and applauded to the skies, resembled Cinderella after her escape from the ball, surrounded by all the attributes of poverty. The dwelling itself was scarcely larger than the cobbler's stall,

"That served him for parlour, for kitchen, and hall."

and consisted of a dining-room containing a table and a few chairs, the bed-room of the father and mother, and a kitchen, of which Rachel had charge, and which was kept scrupulously neat and in excellent order. In the kitchen was a steep staircase leading to an attic in which were three small beds; in one of these slept Rosalie and Charlotte, in the other Raphael, and in the

third Rachel with the little Emilia, then three years old. In this mean bed, used by day as a sofa, the star that nightly drew all the denizens of the world of fashion to one common centre, was wont to con the splendid creations of Racine and Corneille, developing that marvellous faculty of interpreting each masterpiece which astonished as much as it delighted the public. Those who were then on terms of intimacy with her remember her in the little kitchen preparing the vegetables for the *pot au feu*, chatting meanwhile with the friend who had happened to look in, and, now and then, interrupting her culinary cares to still the noise of the younger children, over whom she exercised a maternal surveillance in the absence of the mother. In all things, from the most trifling to the most important, Rachel preserved the same quiet, grave, even dignified aspect; and it was something akin to the ludicrous to see her put down the carrot she was scraping, in order to bestow the most unpoetical, the most matter-of-fact of all corrections on the refractory little sister, with the same unmoved, nay almost solemn expression of countenance, then return to her occupation and the subject she was discussing, as though the interlude had been a part of the performance announced in the pro-

gramme. There was no explosion of anger, no violent scolding; the whipping was by rule, and constituted part of a system.

Meanwhile the success of Rachel was daily on the increase. The most aristocratic circles were anxious to have her appear in their *salons*; but this her severe and judicious professor stoutly opposed. He interdicted all soirées, all readings in private circles, alleging that Rachel owed it to the public and to her own fame to devote all her time to study. An exception which opened the door to all other invitations was finally made in favor of a Polish countess, who pleaded that her husband, confined to his chair by continual indisposition, could not go and hear the young actress on the stage. An elegant turquoise bracelet clasped with a knot of small diamonds was the token of gratitude of the hostess. The pleasure with which Rachel received and wore this gift far surpassed that which she has since felt in the many splendid ones presented to her. Then it was the joy of the girl, delighted with an ornament. A far less innocent feeling was that with which in after years she greeted every addition to her casket.

The precedent of the Polish countess was urged by those whom it was policy not to offend;

another dramatic soirée and another present—a turquoise serpent—was the result. The rule once broken there was a perfect inundation; and the teacher's advice was wholly disregarded. It may have been quite as beneficial for her to go into society as to study in the solitude of her attic. The actor should study human nature in all its phases, and the knowledge acquired in books is turned to better account when tested on living types. The proof of this is that the talent of Rachel, far from falling off or remaining at a stand still after her introduction into society, continued on the increase until it reached its complete development.

Rachel had now been successful in six of the most brilliant tragedies of the classic scene; she had acted *Camille* in the "Horaces;" *Emilie* in "Cinna;" *Hermione* in "Andromaque;" *Amenaide* in "Tancrede;" *Eriphile* in "Iphigenie en Aulide;" and *Monime* in "Mithridates." On the 23rd of November the playbills announced "Bajazet."

It was while this tragedy was in rehearsal that the *sociétaires* of the Théâtre Français and the partisans of Mademoiselle Rachel commenced the series of complaints and recriminations that for some time divided newspaper writers and the

public into two parties. The Théâtre Français which, as already mentioned, had been declining so rapidly as to have reached the brink of irretrievable ruin at the advent of Rachel, was now, thanks to her popularity, in a most prosperous vein. The actress who for two months had played to a "beggary array of empty boxes" and to her Israelite friends in the pit and upper tier, now brought into the house the unprecedented sum of 6000 fr. on every night she played. The net receipts for the month of October had amounted to 100,000 frs. ; the increase in the receipts of the theatre amounted from 65 to 70,000 frs. Though a large portion of the profits went into the pockets of the *sociétaires*, the latter were not the less disposed to find fault with the management, against which they brought the charge of sacrificing the future prosperity of the theatre to that which could only prove a momentary fit of enthusiasm on the part of the public. They urged—and the event proved they were right—that Rachel would soon manifest the most unbounded pretensions; that she was only enriching them for the present to ruin them afterwards; that the precedent would prove the bane of the management.

It has been shown that Rachel entered the

Théâtre Français in March 1838 at a salary of 4000 fr. per annum for three years, and that the management, in the month of October, very liberally agreed to cancel this contract and renew it at a salary of 8000 fr. per annum up to April 1st 1840. There was a stipulated forfeit of 50,000 fr. in case of non-fulfilment of the engagement, and the actress was to provide her own dresses. The management, however, presented her with three of the most expensive of her costumes, with a sum of 1000 frs. in November, and another similar sum in December.

No sooner were these advantages obtained than more were demanded by the rapacious father of Mademoiselle Rachel. While the daughter studied her splendid Greek and Roman characters, and conveyed to worshipping thousands the noblest sentiments of the human heart, the prudent papa studied the labyrinthine mazes of the *Code Civil*, and becoming learned in the law, found out that engagements contracted by minors are easily annulled. Both father and daughter came to the satisfactory conclusion that glory was a marketable commodity only to be valued by what it brought in ready money.

The first demand for his daughter was an increase of salary, raising it to the sum received



by a Councillor of State—12,000 francs per annum. In 1839, in addition to the fixed salary of 12,000 francs, he demanded from 300 to 500 francs perquisites (*feux*) each time she played, according as the receipts of the theatre varied from 4,000 to 5,000 francs and upward—the title of *sociétaire* with a full share, with 12,000 francs from the *subvention*, and four months *congé* every year: the whole claim might be computed at the moderate sum of 60,000 francs per annum.

The management was thunderstruck. It was currently reported that when Rachel went to take her customary lesson of Sanson, her teacher, much astonished that he should have had the polishing of so high-priced a jewel, inquired if, indeed, she had manifested such pretensions as rumour had brought to his ears. To this Rachel coolly replied that according to the *Code Civil*, she was at liberty to cancel her engagements and stipulate for better terms. Sanson indignantly exclaimed that she needed no lessons of him, as he taught declamation, not chicanery, and that he was not in the habit of associating with those who sought the measure of their honour and delicacy within the limits of the *Code Civil*. “Your talent,” added the teacher, dashing to the ground a little *statuette* of Rachel, “will be

shattered and annihilated like that image." He concluded by motioning his pupil to the door, with a "*Sortez!*" that she might have copied with success in the part of *Roxane*.

While *savans*, philosophers, men of letters, critics, and enthusiastic crowds of youths from the colleges and schools—the rising generation that constituted the hope of France—sat entranced, listening with beating hearts and glistening eyes to the grand Alexandrines of *Cornaille*; watching on the varying brow of the actress the expression of the passion she uttered, and themselves passing from pity to rage, from love to hatred, from indignant scorn to satiated vengeance, as her eloquent interpretation bore them along—she, the pythoness delivering the oracles of the god of light, drew her inspiration from the golden calf, the god of her forefathers, and inwardly computed the metallic value of enthusiasm.

A portion of the press, siding with the *sociétaires*, loudly exclaimed against these rapacious exactions. Even Jules Janin repented having created Rachel and talked of demolishing (*sic*) his *pen-work*.

It was too late, however; the public had formed an opinion and was resolved to stand by it. In

the heat of the quarrel the announcement of "Bajazet" gave it a new stimulus, and afforded an opportunity for the manifestation of the antagonistic feelings of each party. On the night of Rachel's first appearance in the difficult part of *Rozane*, October 23rd, symptoms of hostility were evident throughout the house, and her failure was confidently predicted. In the beginning of her career Rachel, playing from intuition, and impelled by the irresistible attraction that led her on the stage, was unconcerned and fearless. When, however, the tide of success had set in, by what may appear a contradiction, but one which the analyser of the human heart will readily understand, she became exceedingly timid whenever she was to appear in a new part. She had now tasted the intoxicating joys of triumph and was the more inclined to dread a defeat that might wither her laurels. Thus it was that on *first* nights she was never as perfect as on the succeeding ones when she felt sure of public support.

With these feelings the effect produced upon her by the icy coldness with which she was received when she appeared on this critical occasion may be readily conceived. The very *Romans* paid by her adversaries sat with immovable hands.

The stifled laughter, the whisperings in the boxes, the anxious looks of friends and the hostile ones of foes, all contributed to shake her courage when most she needed it—in that stumbling-block of genius—in *Rozane*! Her tongue was almost paralysed, her breath was choked, and, for the first time, she was completely frightened.

Envy was justified and triumphant, the star had proved but a fleeting meteor; she could play but such parts as were drilled into her, and even then she required long study; she was but an automaton, &c., &c., &c.

But though on the first night the woman had sunk dismayed at sight of the unfriendly brows, on the second the *artiste* had conquered her terrors, and again taken her place of supremacy with the dignified assurance of conscious genius. Abjuring Olympus and its pagan divinities, she trod with firm step the volcanic soil of the harem, and with admirable *entente* presented the vivid picture of the struggle between love and ambition. She gave in the difficult *rôle* of the absolute Sultana the most complete personification of the despotism, the stern, pitiless politics of the vast empire of the world at that period, joined to the most truly feminine embodiment of love. With *Amurath* she exhibited the remorseless, unflinching deter-

mination of the eastern male despot; with *Bajazet* the gentle, yielding affection of woman, whatever be her clime; as the duped lover, the angry passions of both sexes.

The second night her success was absolute; on the third there was a riot at the doors to obtain admittance, while the scene within the house beggared description. Everyone seemed possessed by a frantic admiration, which was vented in a storm of applause. The ovation thus tributed contrasted with the chill, sulky aspect the same audience presented on the foregoing night.

But though envy was foiled, it was not disarmed. The critics cavilled at her peculiar delivery of certain passages, more especially that of the famous "*Sortez!*" in the second act, when *Rozane* offers the throne to *Bajazet*, and the latter refuses it, alleging specious reasons in order to conceal the real one—his love for *Atalide*. While Rachel listened to his answer the rage she refrained from uttering was most vividly depicted on the expressive countenance; when he had ended her look was such as no other woman could assume; it spoke not so much the fury of the offended woman, loud, stormy, tearing passion to rags, as that of the insulted sovereign, deep, concentrated,

implacable, ferocious in its very calmness. *Bajazet* had evidently scorned the love of a tigress, not a dove. With extended hand she motioned him to the door, and with her harsh voice uttered the "*Sortez!*" that brought down enthusiastic applause from judges of refined taste. In that little word the sentence was signed, the dumb executioner summoned, the death knelled! No rant, no violent gesture, no loud burst of passion accompanied it, the utterance was calm as that of a god delivering the fiat of fate—too calm in its grand eloquence to please the multitude.

It was on this occasion that the charge that she had no heart, no feminine softness, no real feeling, was brought against Rachel. "*Roxane*," urged the critics, "is a woman before she is a Sultana, and, as a woman should give full scope to anger and jealousy, she should throw herself, dagger in hand, on *Bajazet*, yet ere she strikes be disarmed by a look; then, and as though to guard against her own weakness, command his absence with the '*Sortez!*'" This was a most lame and impotent interpretation of the heroine's temper. It was the expression of feeling of a common-place character, not that of an exceptional being, not that of the proud Sultana, whose consciousness of power controls and guides her impetuous nature, of *Roxane*, who

has mutes who *kill* at her bidding. Had *Roxane* herself touched a dagger it would have been to strike at once. Still criticism would not be gain-said, and for years the obnoxious rendering of the "*Sortes* !" was harped upon and discussed until, weary of the struggle, Rachel gave up her own conception of the part and adopted that which was forced upon her; it was less true to nature, and therefore more pleasing to perverted tastes.

A little incident took place at this time which is worth recording as a manifestation of liberal feeling but too rare among artists. Mademoiselle Mars was still on the stage, though the fickle public, faithless to its former idol, frequently reminded her that it was time for her to retire from before the footlights, whose glare revealed but too plainly the ravages of time. Accustomed to the splendid galaxy of a past reign, to a Duchesnois, a Rancourt, a Georges, playing with a Talma to the enthusiastic delight of an audience of crowned heads, Mademoiselle Mars, herself, perhaps, the most brilliant of those stars, was rather incredulous with regard to the merits of the planet then in the ascendant; she chose to judge by her own eyes and ears of the justice of the plaudits so lavishly bestowed. During the first act—the piece

was "Les Horaces"—the ex-queen of tragedy listened coldly; accustomed to the style of former heroines, she pronounced *Camille* rather weak. But at the fourth act, while the public was warmly applauding, some of the flatterers who surrounded Mademoiselle Mars, thinking to soothe the feelings which they imagined must be hurt by the triumph obtained by her young successor, disdainfully echoed the *rather weak*, adding such derogatory epithets as *milk and water*, lukewarm, &c., &c.

"Would you have her roar like a bull?" exclaimed the indignant Mars, full of sympathetic admiration.

During this season of successive triumphs the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" was revived. In this comedy there is a scene in which all the *personnel* of the company, from the reigning favorite down to the candle-snuffer, is bound to appear in order to make up the show. All march on and off the stage in double file, and the public, recognising its favorites, applauds each more or less warmly. Mademoiselle Mars, not being able to endure the fatigue of the costume required (a Turkish one) for the ceremony of the Mamamonchi, wore a Louis XVI. dress, and Mademoiselle Rachel the Oriental one of *Roxane*. The public, aware that



the latter was coming, broke out at her entrance into a frenzy of applause that lasted long after her disappearance. When the curtain fell the declining and the rising stars were both clamorously recalled. Mademoiselle Mars was the first to enter, with that aristocratic air, that *pur sang* look that would have been deemed haughty had it not been tempered by the exceeding grace of the woman and finished *artiste*. She acknowledged the loud acclamations of the public with a slight and gracious, rather than grateful, inclination, and a look of conscious desert, as though she would have said :

“I thank you, good friends, for myself and the young thing who follows me.”

She felt what her brow expressed, that she had come to receive a tribute due to her. Rachel, on the contrary, allowing Mademoiselle Mars to precede her a few paces, thus tacitly acknowledging her supremacy, bowed with grateful humility, as though thankful for a gift. This difference was not studied in either case ; it was innate, and the reason may be found, perchance, in the annals of the two races, one had reached its supremacy, it was the part of the other to bend and cringe to every oppressor.

*Apropos* of this procession it was subsequently seen that Rachel's humility did not make her forget

her interests. In the agreement made with the committee of the Théâtre Français Mademoiselle Rachel was entitled to a perquisite of 500 francs for every time she chose to appear more than twice a-week. She took care, therefore, to join the procession in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," on every occasion claiming the 500 francs for this mute performance of a few minutes. The committee, however, deeming this too expensive a walk across the stage, disputed the payment. From that time the *tragédienne* declined appearing in the show, even on the occasion of Molière's birthday. No pay, no walk.

## CHAPTER VI.

1839.

A Step Higher in Private Life—The Maimed Student and a Scene in "Les Horaces"—The Friendship of the Great—L'Abbaye aux Bois—Madame Récamier—The Jewish Actress and a Dignitary of the Church—A Stranger to Venus—Rachel in Comedy—"Esther."

THE prosperous state of their finances now enabled the Felix family to indulge in the comforts, if not the luxuries, of life. In the winter of 1839 the mean lodgings they had hitherto occupied were exchanged for better ones on a second floor of the Passage Vérot Dodat. This apartment Rachel's earnings enabled them to furnish respectably, and she had a room to herself for the first time. The chief ornament of this room, which was long, lofty, and narrow, consisted in the trophies she had won. To the three curtain poles of the bed were hung three garlands decorated with ribbons, bearing devices embroi-

dered in gold recording her success. Other similar crowns were hung on the walls. The room of her parents was next to her own, and was furnished in a manner that to them was quite luxurious ; yet they took possession of it as though accustomed to it all their life.

It was about this time that Rachel introduced into the *rôle* of *Camille* the by-play that is so effective in the second scene of the fourth act, when *Valère* is describing the combat of the *Horacii* and the *Curiacii*. The following incident suggested the improvement. The actress, who was slightly indisposed, had remained in her chamber one morning, when she heard a caller in the *salon*. Curious to know who it was, she rose and went close to the door, through which she distinctly heard the voice, and recognized it as that of an acquaintance of the family, a young student of surgery. In answer to the question put by her mother and sisters as to why he had been so long absent, he told a fearful story of some accident, while dissecting, that had necessitated the amputation of his hand. Rachel, already ill, was so overcome with horror at this description that she fainted. The noise of her fall brought the family to her assistance and she soon recovered. It was then the idea occurred to

her that if she, who was not particularly interested in this young man, had been so much impressed by the narrative of his accident, how terrible must be the shock on the nerves of one who hears of her lover's death. She remarked to Sanson that when next she played *Camille* she would introduce a new effect. She did so and met with great success. As *Valère* proceeded in his speech, Mademoiselle Rachel listened with the greatest expression of grief and horror depicted on her countenance and in her attitude, and, when he arrived at the bloody catastrophe, she fell senseless. The actor who played *Valère*, addressing his discourse to old *Horace*, does not see *Camille*. Astonished to find himself interrupted by such unusual tokens of approbation, he fancied he must be particularly good that evening, and, excited by this idea, made extraordinary efforts to deserve such plaudits, throwing a vast amount of heat and passion in his part, to which no one was listening, so much did the mute acting of *Camille* engross attention.

Success seemed to pursue this fortunate family: the management again cancelled Rachel's engagement and renewed it at 20,000 frs. per annum. It became the fashion to receive the pet of the

public in private circles, and invitations from the highest quarters, and rich gifts were of daily occurrence. Rachel was the rage, and not only the most aristocratic French *salons*, but also the most distinguished foreign residents made it a point of adding the attraction of her presence to their fêtes. The actress was the fashionable luxury of the day and must be had at any cost of money or of pride. Such was the influence of vanity that some of the noblest children of once proud Spain—the Duchess of Berwick and Alba, the Marchioness of Alcanices, the Princess of Anglona, the Countess of Toreno, M. de Roca de Togares, ex-minister of Marine, the Marquis de los Llanos, the Count de la Vega del Pozo, &c., &c.—condescended to admit the daughter of the Jew-peddler on terms of momentary equality. The high-born Novailles received her in their morning circles and the duke became her most assiduous adviser, often spending whole evenings with her. Ministers of state desired her to appoint the day when she would dine with them; Count Duchatel, minister of the interior, presented her with a choice library, and Madame Duchatel was extremely fond of her society.

In the convent of the Abbaye aux Bois was wont to assemble a semi-mundane, semi-mystic

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circle, composed of some of the most distinguished fragments of the Restoration and of some of the most respected ruins of the Empire, and of which Madame de Récamier, the celebrated ex-queen of beauty, was the cynosure. This lady, who had survived the charms that had been the envy of her contemporary, Madame de Stäel, and the wealth that had given them relief, still preserved the amiability that had characterized her through life, and which in her declining years brought around her the most eminent personages of the day. True to the friendship that had so long existed between them, M. de Chateaubriand continued to visit her, and her alone, even after he had lost the use of his limbs. His faithful valet, Louis, supported him up the stairs, seated him in his arm-chair and installed him in his favorite corner. Into this refined and fastidious circle Mademoiselle Rachel was freely admitted, and it must be owned that her modest demeanour and perfect tact proved her not unworthy of the honor. It has been said that the hope of converting the popular idol of the day contributed materially to the cordiality of her reception. If so, no fault can be found with the feeling; the public baptism in Notre Dame of the wonderful actress would have been for the church no mean triumph, and it is probable no

efforts were spared by these faithful votaries to bring about such a result.

. But though "Hermione" was possessed of the eminently Jewish faculty of apparently conforming to the wishes of those whom it was her interest to please, she had, then at least, not the slightest idea of becoming a convert. Under the inspiration of her illustrious hosts she studied the part of *Pauline* in "Polyeucte;" but though she uttered before them the "*Je crois*" in accents that inspired the most sanguine hopes, she left the cœnaculum of the rue de Sevres as much of a Jewess as she had entered it.

At one of the morning literary *réunions* at the Abbaye aux Bois, Mademoiselle Rachel was reciting to M. de Chateaubriand, at the request of Madame Récamier, passages from the *rôle* of "Pauline;" the actress was on the point of uttering the lines :

"Mon époux, en mourant, m'a laissé ses lumières ;  
Son sang dont ses bourreaux viennent de me couvrir,  
M'a dessillé les yeux et me les vient d'ouvrir  
JE VOIS, JE SAIS, JE CROIS !"

when the recitation was interrupted by the unexpected visit of the Archbishop of . . . . .

"Monseigneur," said Madame de Récamier, with some slight embarrassment, "permit me to



present to your grace Mademoiselle Rachel, who is so obliging as to give us a scene from "Polyeucte."

"I would infinitely regret," replied the visitor, "having interrupted the finest verses of Corneille; I hope I may be favoured also."

No scruples prevented Rachel from continuing the part of *Pauline*. She had no hesitation in exclaiming with the convert to Christianity, *I see, I know, I believe!* before a high dignitary of the church.

When she had concluded, the archbishop was most earnest in his praise.

"We, the ministers of the Most High," added he, "have not often the pleasure of seeing and hearing great artistes; but I have been thus fortunate twice in my life: in Florence I have heard Madame Malibran sing in a *salon*, and to Madame Récamier I am indebted for the privilege of hearing Mademoiselle Rachel. The lips that so eloquently utter those magnificent lines must be inspired by a heart filled with the sentiment they express."

To this Mademoiselle Rachel, bowing gracefully, replied:

"Monseigneur, *I believe!*"

*Apropos* of these recitations at the Abbaye

aux Bois, Madame Delphine Gay, the celebrated mother of as celebrated a daughter, is reported to have given way to an amusing outburst of indignation. Returning one morning from a visit to the convent, she threw herself, in an arm-chair, exclaiming :

“Can any one imagine so absurd a thing! Just fancy a parcel of rusty old academicians teaching Rachel to act *Phèdre*! Brifault, the greatest stranger to Venus, uttering

‘C’est Venus toute entière à sa proie attachée!’

What can *he* know of the feelings of the victim of the goddess of love and beauty?”

It has been said that Rachel is never so happy as when she can act in comedy, and especially the *soubrettes* of Molière; parts utterly unsuited to her, and in which, however accurate her conception of the character, her hollow, cavernous voice, her tragic gait, gesture, and look, render her unendurable, not to say absurd. In certain dramatic *rôles* she has been greatly applauded; for instance in that of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, in which she appeared to advantage; but it was certainly more as a pretty woman than as a finished artiste that she won admiration. The success she obtained in *Adrienne* induced her to

extend her incursions still farther into the domain of Mademoiselle Mars; she played in succession, *Louise de Lignerolles*, *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle*, *Madame Tartuffe*, and other rôles of the modern drama, in all of which her voice prevented her from attaining to that degree of excellence to which her acting would have raised her.

As to the *soubrettes* of Molière, she undertook them on the following occasions:

In 1844 the theatre of the Odeon having had a constant run of ill luck, was closed; but as the public of that quarter of Paris required a theatre, the authorities decided that the management of the Théâtre Français should provide for both theatres, one company doing duty alternately in both houses. Rachel was obliged to take her share in this work. The plan was soon found to entail too great fatigue on the performers on account of the distance between the theatres, and was very soon given up.

It was during this period of double duty that Raphael and Rebecca Felix were brought out, the insatiate father exacting, without the shadow of a pretence that, at the very *débüt* of these children who had never set foot on the stage, a benefit should be granted to them. This unprecedented demand was conceded, much to the dis-

pleasure of other members of the company, who saw these young Jews thus unjustly enjoying privileges that time and merit alone obtained for others. In order to draw a crowded house on the benefit night a tragedy was announced, after which, to increase the attraction, Rachel was to appear in the part of *Dorine* in "Tartuffe." The public, curious to see the great tragic actress in two such opposite characters, completely filled the house. The rumour that she excelled in the rôle of a *soubrette* had been industriously circulated; the disappointment was in proportion to the expectations that had been raised. Rachel was too much a favorite in her own line to meet with very open marks of disapprobation in attempting another; but that the attempt was not a complete failure was solely due to the courteous indulgence of the audience. The language of the saucy, pert little *Dorine*, uttered in the deep, sepulchral tones of a *Camille* calling down the wrath of heaven on the capital of the world, the tragic stride and gesture, constituted a combination of the sublime and the grotesque that sorely tried the patience of the spectators.

Four years later, on the first July, in another extra performance on the occasion of another

benefit of Raphael and Rebecca, the play being "Phèdre" followed by a little piece in one act, by Marivaux, the playbills announced that the evening would close with "Le Dépit Amoureux," in which Rachel would take the part of *Marinette*. Once again the impatience of the public was extreme to see how this genius which had reached its *apogée* would stand the test in so varied a range. This time the failure was complete and the dissatisfaction undissembled. When she entered in *soubrette* costume the applause was perfectly frantic, but she no sooner spoke than it was apparent how much she was out of place in the part, and an icy silence testified the chagrin of the audience.

On these two occasions only did Rachel ever act the *soubrettes*, and then to further the interests of her relatives and gratify a passing caprice rather than from any vocation.

The only *rôle* added by Mademoiselle Rachel to her *repertoire* during the year 1839 was that of *Esther*. To understand in what points she failed in her conception of this character, we must call to mind what the poet intended to delineate when he wrote the part. The female characters of Racine are exquisite creations. Take them all, from *Esther* to *Bérénice*, from

*Phèdre* to *Hermione*, not one but is gifted with the melting tenderness that captivates, or with the resistless stormy passion that overwhelms. In his male characters he has not been equally successful ; with the exception of the vehement *Orestes* and the iron-willed *Nero*, his heroes are rather weak-brained and seem cut out for hen-pecked husbands. In this Racine differs essentially from *Corneille*, whose male characters are splendid specimens of chivalrous love and valor, while his heroines, with the exception of the noble, the lovely *Chimène*, are raw-boned viragos.

One of Racine's most constant opponents says, that the female characters of Racine constitute a wonderful seraglio where the poet has assembled all the glowing visions of his fancy, all the earnest passions of his soul, clothed in celestial forms. He has divided them into two distinct groups, both equally bewitching. On one side we have *Aricie*, *Andromaque*, *Iphigénie*, *Bérénice*, *Atalide*, *Esther*, and *Junie*, the women who love and who die—on the other, *Hermione*, *Phèdre*, *Rozane*, *Emilie*, the women who love and who kill ; here the dove, there the lioness. Of these two natures, so diametrically opposite in feeling and expression, though actuated by the

same passion, one was altogether foreign to that of Mademoiselle Rachel, and therefore beyond her power of delineation. In one of those rare, angelic characters, all feminine gentleness, mildness, and abnegation, in which, however, passion, veiled under the semblance of silent resignation and patient grief, is not the less strong, resolute, and enduring—the great actress is completely out of her sphere. Her voice has the hard, metallic tone of a trumpet; it is never choked by unshed tears, or softened by suppressed emotion. There is nothing that betrays the inward wound, the fire that consumes slowly, but surely, without outward flame. She approaches her lover with calm brow, unmoistened eye, unfaltering voice, and resolute pace. Nothing betokens the shrinking timidity, the bashful fear that possess so powerful a charm. She crosses the stage with dignified assurance, her voice preserving its steady, ironical tone, amid the most stormy conflicts of unchained, raging passions.

All the foregoing objections apply most especially to the *rôle* of *Esther*. The ethereal and mystic beauty whose magic glance suffices to tame the Assyrian is a young, gentle, pious creature, left in a foreign land at the mercy

of a conqueror, and thrown in a harem where she is surrounded by heathen women who have lost all innate modesty, and to whom religion has never taught remorse. *Esther*, the slave, the concubine, is freed by grace and legalized by love. Personified by Mademoiselle Rachel, the lovely ideal of Racine disappears; the witching dream is dispelled; the *houri* of the Asiatic harem is far from gentle, the slave is threatening, the concubine cold, the maiden imperious. Even the graceful piety of *Esther* is lost, for no heaven-inspired faith breathes in the measured accents of the daughter of Israel, speaking of her own God, the dread God of the Jews. In lieu of the almost divine creature, more visible to the mystic sense than to the eye—in lieu of this celestial vision whose features reflect all the noble gifts that have their source in her clear, unsullied soul—this maiden, chosen among a thousand, not for a beauty that others may possess in like perfection, but for that nameless charm that gives to its possessor the empire of the world, there was a talented woman, uttering with correct precision the poetic lines, but never personifying the idea. Her qualities here are all negative; she never rants, it is true, but neither does she



feel acutely; she is never carried away by violent passion, but neither has she any warmth of expression; she does not sob aloud, but she has no tears.

## CHAPTER VII.

1840.

Artistic Career—First Period one of Constant Struggle and Arduous Toil—Eminent Critics of the Day—Granier de Cassagnac—Jules Janin—Theophile Gauthier—Edouard Thierry—the Public becomes Exacting—Incident at a Soirée—Rachel at Eighteen—Taxed with want of Real Feeling—Tact—Manners—Delicate Health—Solicitude of the Public.

THE initiatory steps in life of the actress, the narrative of the more or less extraordinary circumstances that have withdrawn her from the crowd and placed her at the entrance of the road to fame, the vicissitudes of the family circle, these are but secondary elements in her biography. Incidents of private life may amuse the reader, but what he seeks more especially in the life of an eminent actress is a page of the history of dramatic art, in her time and in the country in which she won her laurels. Her stage career,

therefore, constitutes the most important part of her biography.

The years 1838 and 1839 had witnessed the astonishing *débûts* of Mademoiselle Rachel. It now remained that she should consolidate her position and justify a permanent possession of the sceptre she had seized. This could only be done by severe study; it was requisite that she should not only perfect the parts she had acted at her several *débûts*, but that she should add others to her *répertoire*, and create new *rôles* in new plays. The more indulgent the public shows itself to inexperienced but real talent, the more it is likely to exact from that talent in its maturity. This is the reason why the majority of those who have been cried up as phenomena in their youth, in after years sink into insignificance and oblivion.

This era constitutes, then, the real artistic career of Mademoiselle Rachel. Beginning with the year 1840, it closed with the American excursion, undertaken July 30, 1856, and terminated January 1857.

The dramatic year is divided into two very distinct portions, during one of which the time and services of the actor pertain exclusively to the theatre at which he is permanently engaged;

during the other, which is that of his *congés*, he makes his provincial or foreign tour.

According to the terms of her engagement, Mademoiselle Rachel had a *congé* of three months in the year, June, July, and August, the remaining nine months were to be devoted exclusively to the Théâtre Français. In these nine months are to be sought the difficulties she overcame in her profession, the new *rôles* she played in known plays, and those she created in new ones—in a word her artistic labors.

To the careful record of whatsoever worthy of note occurred in these sixteen years, there has been added in the following pages a critical analysis, or, at least, a more or less detailed sketch of the plays in which she appeared, and particularly of the characters she played.

The opinions of the eminent critics of the day have been given as being of no little importance in a work of this kind, particularly when we find the opinions of the public represented by men such as Granier de Cassagnac, Theophile Gauthier, and Jules Janin; the setters up and destroyers of theatrical idols.

Monsieur Granier de Cassagnac, whose literary articles then appeared in "La Presse," but who was subsequently appointed *député*, and distin-

guished himself by his energetic and eloquent political articles in the "Constitutionnel" in 1848, and by his strenuous adhesion to the Emperor, was, in 1840, bound by ties of friendship and fellowship to the disciples of the modern school. In point of fact, he was a classicist, especially with regard to Corneille, for whom he found no praise sufficient. This predilection might have been the result of the affinity that his own stern, uncompromising character presented in some respects with that of the great father of French tragedy. As for Racine, he treated him as cavalierly and unceremoniously as did the partisans of the romantic school.

Jules Janin, the *feuilletonist* of the "Débats" was also a champion of the classical school, notwithstanding which he attacked it unscrupulously whenever it suited his fitful moods. Jules Janin is one of those capricious geniuses who, when a word presents itself on which an article may be spun out, no matter how paradoxical or antagonistic to their former judgements, never hesitate to present that article to the astonished public. Thus he frequently spares his friends as little as his opponents, lashing the first and praising the latter with equal injustice and equal eloquence—or at any rate, with that torrent of high-sounding

words and intricate phrases that is too often taken as the current coin of eloquence. Yet, though he thus permits too exuberant a fancy and a too ready pen to run on somewhat at random sometimes, Jules Janin is at others one of the most truly eloquent, most fascinating, most moving of writers. He possesses too, sterling qualities of the heart, not always found in the *feuilletonist*—Jules Janin has been invariably the apologist of the fallen, the respectful and generous advocate of the absent; he has been ever more ready to present his homage to royalty in exiles than to royalty on the throne, and that too in revolutionary days when such conduct was not only noble but courageous.

Theophile Gauthier, also of "La Presse," was the zealous organ of the school of Victor Hugo and Co.; but though he attacked the classic authors he was just to their interpreters, weighing with impartiality their artistic merits and demerits. Theophile Gauthier had commenced life as an amateur painter, but finding that he was not destined in that vocation ever to pass the limits of mediocrity, he exchanged the brush for the pen and soon justified his new choice. Some vestiges of the first taste are perceivable in the critical analyses of the *feuilletonist*, the painter's eye for

the correctness of details and the picturesque of the *ensemble*, adds much interest to the eloquence of his descriptions. No other critic conveyed so lively, so faithful an impression of Rachel. He paints admirably, and with more minuteness than any other writer, the effects she produced, her peculiar points; every little detail that can give an idea of her person, even to the most minute particulars of her toilette, are graphically reproduced, yet none seem trivial or out of place. His pen photographs the actress in all her *rôles*. M. Gauthier is at the present day the dramatic *feuilletonist* of the "Moniteur." Edouard Thierry must not pass unnoticed among the eminent writers who wielded the delicate pruning-knife of criticism. Of all those whose judgment and opinions on Rachel passed current with the public he was perhaps the most conscientious, exact and impartial. M. Thierry writes at present in the *partie littéraire* of the "Moniteur."

So far fortune had seemed to forget her usual fickleness in favor of her privileged child. Prosperity had constantly expanded her sails; the flowing tide of success had known no check. With the year 1840 there came a sudden reaction; the hot enthusiasm that had bubbled up to such a mad pitch cooled off and descended to

a degree of lukewarmness and indifference very alarming to the prospects of its object. The symptoms of this distressing state of things were plainly manifested on the night of the benefit of Mademoiselle Mars, on which occasion Mademoiselle Rachel played in "Andromaque."

The very critics that had hitherto been so loud in her praise were as ready to cavil and condemn, and Jules Janin himself in his attempt to vindicate the inconstancy of her quondam admirers, is compelled to lay the blame on the insatiate desire for *something new* that is the ruling passion of the public. The idol had not changed—therein consisted her fault; the change was in her audience that knew her by heart. She had played her *répertoire* over and over again until it had palled upon the satiated ears of her hearers, who could tell beforehand every gesture, intonation and look. Every expression of love, every outcry of grief, every storm of passion, every shade of irony and glance of haughty pride, every well-prepared effect was stereotyped. The audience knew all the strong and all the weak points, where to be attentive and where to be careless, where to applaud and where to be indifferent. The very perfection that had formerly elicited such raptures now became intolerably same; for, however ad-



mirable the acting, it failed to interest, inasmuch as it no longer astonished; it raised no expectations, it elicited no curiosity. Unequal, and therefore inferior acting where the unforeseen excludes monotony, would have been preferred to this unvaried correctness. The audience had come with the best intentions of being entertained. They had counted upon a certain amount of sensation; they had stipulated for emotions of grief, terror, pity and delight—they found themselves listening coldly to the finest passages, insensible to the most telling points, and wearied with the length of the play!

But we will take Jules Janin's own words:

“All the talent in the world, especially when continually applied to the same dramatic works, will not satisfy continually the hearer. . . . What pleases in a great actor, as in all arts that appeal to the imagination, is the unforeseen. When I am utterly ignorant of what is to happen, when I do not know, when you yourself do not know, what will be your next gesture, your look, what passion will possess your heart, what outcry will burst from your terror-stricken soul; then, indeed, I am willing to see you daily, for each day you will be new to me; to-day I may blame, to-morrow praise; yesterday you were all-powerful,

to-morrow, perhaps, you may hardly win from me a word of admiration; so much the better, then, if you draw from me unexpected tears; if in my heart you strike an unknown fibre; but tell me not of hearing night after night great artists who every time present the exact counterpart of what they were the preceding one."

Critics were unanimous in exacting that Rachel should study new *rôles*, saying that it was the only way to renew this young talent, so full of sap and vigour, in lieu of allowing it to languish and grow stale in two or three invariably recurring parts, thus condemning to motionless inactivity this powerful intelligence.

Mademoiselle Rachel, on her side, having accustomed herself to draw the greater part of her strength from the constant support of the public, at the sight of the coldness and indifference with which her former enthusiastic patrons now greeted her, was herself chilled and paralysed; she stopped short at the aspect of the unimpressed, unmoved galleries. The applause of her audience had become indispensable to her; the moment it was lacking she became powerless. She could not endure this ill-boding silence, she imagined her gesture, her look, her voice, would instantly break the spell; failing in this she became confused, she

forgot the character she represented and, to win back the stimulus she lacked, rushed headlong into all the extremes and exaggerations of dramatic art ; where she was wont to show irritation, she became furious ; where she was wont to be proud and dignified, she was pompous ; her irony, usually her most powerful weapon, assumed a sharp, strange tone that marred the intended effect.

Thus the habit of praise without limits, and admiration without counterpoise had borne bitter fruits. The most passionate of her adherents gave vent to scolding fits, crying out that the plaything was stale ! And this is one of the terrible but inevitable phases of every artist's life.

There was undoubtedly some relaxation of exertion on the part of the actress who did not sufficiently bear in mind that in public as in private life it is easier to win favor than to retain it. But there was also great and manifest injustice on the part of the public in requiring from this girl of eighteen, with only two years' stage practice, the qualities of a consummate actress whose talent had reached its maturity, to whom years and long familiarity with the boards have given experience, and whose countenance, losing all individuality, has become a plastic mask, reproducing at will every emotion, every contradictory passion. To

have obtained such unqualified applause as had been awarded to her in the characters of *Hermione*, of *Camille*, of *Eriphile*, of *Roxane*, by the veteran playgoers who remembered Mademoiselle Duchesnois, Mademoiselle Mars, and Mademoiselle Georges in their prime, to have acted with unquestionable talent, if not to perfection, *Amenaïde*, *Monime*, and *Esther*, might surely have been deemed sufficient in this young genius.

Nor was the creation of new rôles the only demand of the exacting public. Qualities completely foreign to her nature and the opposites of those she possessed were clamorously called for by the critics, even by her warmest partisans. No one seemed disposed to concede that she to whom nature had granted the facility of excelling in the delineations of bitter irony, indignant rage, vindictive hatred, and furious jealousy, could not as readily portray excessive tenderness, melting grief, all the mild and gentle passions with the infinite and delicately defined shades that lend them so great a charm and ensure them so powerful a hold on the human heart.

Another reason for the coldness of a portion of the public may be found in the disgust the sordid, grasping temper of old Felix had excited. The dissensions between the management and the

exacting Jew had engendered a bitterness of which the daughter was made to feel the effects. Though it may be urged that as a minor she was not to blame for the venality of her parents, after-years proved that when free to follow the dictates of her own will she was no degenerate daughter of Israel, and quite as ready as her fair ancestress and prototype to possess herself of the gods of silver and of gold at the expense of honesty and justice.

Notwithstanding the urgings of her partisans and the clamorous complaints of the press, the actress followed the judicious advice of the enlightened guide she had chosen. She wisely abstained from undertaking the creation of new *rôles*. To give life to the idea of an author, to open a path on ground where no foot had preceded hers, to venture on the unknown without the guide of traditional success and failures to teach her what to follow and what to avoid was, for one so completely illiterate, to rush into perils from which no exertions of her untutored genius could extricate her. The task required deep study of the character, thorough knowledge of the history, nation, habits, manners, public and private life, even of the expression of countenance and external appearance of the personage to be repre-

sented. Mademoiselle Rachel contented herself with adding several revivals to her *répertoire* during this and the two succeeding years, and it was not until the year 1843 that she ventured to create a *rôle*, when study had better, though even then not sufficiently, fitted her for the effort.

Mademoiselle Rachel was at this time eighteen years of age, and her constitution, which was never strong, seemed to be giving way altogether. She could play but twice a-week, and those who saw her at the close of each performance deemed that one must be her last, so frail, so reed-like was her figure. She was threatened with a complaint of the lungs, and was subject to frequent fits of illness. At the recurrence of each attack, the anxious solicitude of the public was manifested in the most flattering manner, as much interest being taken in her health as though she had been some potentate wielding the destinies of nations. The newspapers published daily bulletins of her health, and her door was besieged by anxious enquirers of the highest rank.

But, though so often incapacitated by illness, when able to exert herself, Rachel found time to make some amends by study for the deficiencies of early education. She made herself mistress

of the grammatical difficulties of the language whose literary gems she so splendidly interpreted ; she soon learned to write correctly, and she had been too long accustomed to the pure and classical grace of Corneille and Racine not to express herself with elegance in conversation. This girl, whose childhood had been spent in the haunts of poverty and in the companionship of the illiterate, the vulgar, and low-bred, had so keen an intuition of the *proprieties* of high-toned society, so great a facility of adaptation, so ready a tact, so quick a perception of the beautiful, that she was never out of place in the aristocratic *salons* into which, in the early part of her career, she was admitted. She was there well bred, gentle, and unaffected, accepting and acting the part of a gentlewoman as though to the manner born. Her taste was cultivated by the study of the classics, and she enjoyed the advantage of frequenting the most refined circles, as well as the intimacy of the most accomplished men in France. In the *salon* of Mademoiselle Rachel, of which she did the honors with the most perfect grace and tact, not only the illustrious of the literary world, but the most eminent statesmen, the most talented politicians of the day were wont to assemble.

Though nature and habit were thus broken in and curbed under the yoke of will, they returned at times in full force, justifying the proverb of "*chassez le naturel il retourne au galop.*" Whether this was the case, or whether excess of vanity or some other cause had evil-disposed the idol, it is certain that on some occasions she behaved with excessive discourtesy. The following, which was related to the writer by the chief performer in the little scene, may be relied on as a specimen of her occasional shortcomings.

The niece of Ducis, Madame Victoire Babois, so well known as the author of the admirable "Maternal Elegies," and who had reached the advanced age of 78, was then prostrated by the illness that was to terminate her existence. The celebrated poetess, Madame Mélanie Waldor, seeking to amuse her old friend with the little items of news of the day, mentioned that Madame de Gasparin, the wife of the Minister of the Interior, was to give a magnificent *soirée*, and that Mademoiselle Rachel was among the expected guests. "Ah!" exclaimed Madame Babois, "before I die I will address a few lines to this great tragic actress; you shall have them tomorrow." On the following day Madame Waldor received from the hands of the dying woman



a dozen lines which, to her great regret, she has since lost.

Some twelve hundred persons that evening anxiously awaited the arrival of Mademoiselle Rachel, who was then performing in "Les Horaces" at the Théâtre Français. At half-past eleven she had not arrived. No other artist, no poet, no musician, had been invited to contribute their talents towards lightening the *ennui* of the cold, tedious official *soirée*. Madame de Gasparin and many of her distinguished guests earnestly requested that Madame Waldor would recite one of her own poems; but that lady, unwilling to place herself on the same footing with Mademoiselle Rachel, whose business it was to entertain the public, positively declined. She came at last—the long-expected idol. A dead silence ensued, shortly after succeeded by a universal stir and bustle; everyone was endeavoring to get near to see, and, if possible, speak to her who created all this excitement.

The Jewish Melpomenè was dressed in white, and was exceedingly thin, but on her brow she wore the consecrating seal of destiny—the tragic look that was the indelible sign of her mission. Had it not been for this redeeming point she might have been thought insignificant. She

recited with consummate talent a scene from "Cinna," and was greatly applauded. It was then that the hostess said to her, introducing Madame W—— :

"This lady is Madame Mélanie Waldor, one of our poetical glories; she is the friend of a woman of great talent who, though on her death-bed, has written some exquisite lines in your honor. Madame Waldor will read them to you."

Mademoiselle Rachel did not answer a word or give the least token even of acquiescence.

Madame Waldor then read in a tone of great emotion her friend's lines; they were full of noble sentiments, and spoke the most graceful praise. Mademoiselle Rachel uttered no word of gratitude, made no sign of courteous acknowledgment. She maintained the same immoveable, stiff silence. Had she been deaf, dumb, and blind, she could not have appeared more insensible to this touching homage sent to her from the brink of the grave. The guests looked at each other in astonishment. Madame Waldor turned abruptly away.

"That little girl," said she aloud to Madame de Gasparin, with her rough Breton frankness, careless of being overheard, "that little girl has received of Heaven a great gift, but with it she has neither heart nor brains."

Madame Waldor subsequently met Mademoiselle Rachel at the houses of Madame de Récamier and other persons of distinction where fashion had introduced the actress, but she never saw reason to change her opinion.

Among the charges brought against Rachel even at this early period of her career was that of lacking tenderness, feminine softness. To this her partisans reply that she possesses both in an eminent degree, but that she lacks the faculty of expressing them from the very fact that her voice is so well suited to the utterance of violent passions. Neither has she the gift of tears, and of this deficiency she is herself fully aware; we cannot call forth the tears of others unless we can ourselves weep, or at least are deeply moved. In proof that she had no real feeling, and that her exquisite acting was the result of quick perception and earnest study, it was urged that when she came off the stage her pulse remained perfectly natural, her skin cool, her voice calm, even though she had just exhibited the utmost extremes of mental agony on the boards. This assertion, however, is not correct. Whatever the degree of feeling Mademoiselle Rachel may possess the above allegations as to the lack of external tokens of it are false. When playing some of her arduous

*rôles* she was covered with perspiration even in the depth of winter. After the utterance of the terrific imprecations of *Camille* she used to remain several minutes gasping for breath, her eyes seeming to withdraw into their orbits, and her lips assuming a violet hue. A consequence of this fearful excitement in one of her delicacy of constitution was the illness that necessitated her long sojourn in Egypt. That this overwrought state may at times have been somewhat exaggerated for the sake of effect is very probable ; at any rate, after the most laborious scenes, such as those of fourth and fifth acts, she frequently fell fainting in the arms of her mother and her maid, who were always waiting for her behind the scenes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

1840.

Alarming Incident—Three Plays revived this year: "Nicomede," "Polyeucte" and "Marie Stuart"—Benefit of Mademoiselle Thénard at Versailles—Why Racine is Generally Preferred to Corneille—Mademoiselle Rachel as Pauline—Commences her Tour through the Provinces—Début at Rouen—Letter to the Manager—The Medallion of "My Second Father"—Success at Lyons, &c., &c—Re-appearance at the Théâtre Français—Indifference of the Public for the Classical Drama—Artistic Selfishness.

THE year 1840 was ushered in in rather an alarming manner for Mademoiselle Rachel, who was then residing in the Passage Vérot Dodat. She was roused from her sleep at four o'clock in the morning of the 1st of January by the blazing and crackling of the bed-room floor. However, the fire, which had originated in one of the shops of the firm of Aubert, on the first floor, then filled with albums, portfolios and other combustible articles for New Year presents, was soon got under and little damage was done.

On the 22nd of February Mademoiselle Rachel played in Versailles. This was the first time she had acted out of Paris. The play was "Cinna," and it was given for the benefit of Madame Thénard, who always performed the part of *confidante* to all the tragic characters of Mademoiselle Rachel, giving her the cue by her ready replies, and receiving her maternally in her arms at the moment of the catastrophe.

A little incident, characteristic of the tragédienne's proneness to make promises which she afterwards regretted and made no scruple of breaking, occurred on the occasion of this trip to Versailles. She had invited three or four friends to accompany her, and as an inducement to get them to go so far on a very cold night to see "Cinna" for the twentieth time, she promised to give them a snug little supper on their return to Paris.

After the play the party set out in a hackney coach as old as the man who drove it, and his age might be judged by the fact that he had belonged to the household of the Count de Provence who had sent him to the King of Spain in the year 1791, before the princes emigrated; the gait of the horses seemed to prove them contemporaries of the coachman. The night was terribly cold and the party was two hours reaching Paris.

The guests' expectation of the good supper that was to recruit their spirits after the fatigue of the journey bore it patiently. Great then was their dismay when, on arriving at the gates of the Passage Vérot Dodat, Rachel having whispered to her mother as they alighted, the old lady, turning to their frozen and starved companions, dismissed them with "*Au revoir, Messieurs, I think we shall all sleep soundly!*" Rachel was subsequently so known among her comrades for inviting people to dinners and suppers she did not give them that it was seldom they were deceived into believing her.

So violent was the reaction against her at this period among the critics that on the occasion of her playing in "Mithridates" at the Odéon on the 18th of April, the only notice taken of her by Jules Janin, her quondam admirer, was the careless remark that she *had appeared in one of her three characters*. The play was for the benefit of Faure, the old actor; the house was very thinly filled.

On the 9th of April the play of "Nicomede" was revived for her. *Laodice* was taken little notice of. The public was impatient for the long-announced part of *Pauline* in "Polyeucte." In general, however, Racine is preferred to Corneille. The preference is readily explained.

Corneille personifies the genius of antiquity, and is the worthy rival of Shakespear and Calderon. But the themes of his tragedies have, except under peculiar circumstances, lost much of their interest at the present day. Politics, religion, national honor inspired the austere muse of Corneille; hence his plays produce the greatest sensation in times of war or of revolution.

Love, on the contrary, is the chief subject of Racine's masterpieces and gives them an interest which is of all ages and all nations.

Though a religious feeling is indispensable for the just appreciation of "Polyeucte," others are equally excited. Neither the interests of religion nor the fate of empires are here at stake; the theme, based on the devotion of an enthusiastic man, the struggles in the heart of a woman divided between love and pity, and the respectful passion of a lover who vainly endeavors to save his rival, reach the heart of every spectator.

"Polyeucte" was revived on the 15th of May. This fine tragedy had not been on the stage for twenty-two years, and, even before the death of Talma, it had been thought impossible to act it at the Théâtre Français, so difficult is the part of its heroine, in whom are personified in all their purity the noblest passions of the human heart: love,



duty, faith, and enthusiasm. While the various feelings and passions are indicated and distinguished by subtle and delicate shades, its sentiments are within the strict limits of good sense. Heroism itself, based on stern reason, is here calm, deliberate and subdued; there are no sudden transports, no fiery impulses, no bursts of passion, no ironical taunts; in this high soul pride itself has no place. But, because the character is not violent, it by no means follows that it is tame, and when Mademoiselle Rachel first acted the part she showed no comprehension of the nice distinctions that constitute its chief charm. The rôle of *Pauline* combines two apparently discordant elements, the heroine is, in fact, half Pagan and half Christian. She belongs at once to the Gods of the capitol and to the God of the Christians. The part of this sainted young heathen demands an innocent, chaste, and pure young soul; infinite ease, grace, and repose of manner. The noble young maiden, whose heart is so free from guile that she has no motive for concealment, utters unhesitatingly every thought, steps with the unswerving boldness of innocence, is frank, loyal, and free even with *Severe*, though she reciprocates his love, and meets him after a years' absence as though they had been parted but a few hours. In

her delineation Mademoiselle Rachel erred sadly. She spoke the part with her usual clear, correct, impressive intonation, but with the same inflexions from beginning to end, the same deep, sepulchral tones, whether addressing her father, her lover, or her husband, giving it an intolerable sameness, while her gestures expressed a timid hesitancy denoting fear, and destitute of dignity. For girlish grace she substituted the stern demeanor of a Roman matron, folding her robe about her with the severe gesture and look of one called upon to resist a seducer. In all probability the actress was really afraid of the numberless difficulties this rôle presents, and sought to avoid them by maintaining a uniform, even delivery, compelling the actors who surrounded her to adopt a species of slow undertone and subdued action, imparting not only to the part of *Pauline* but to the whole play, a monotony that produced on the audience something very like *ennui*. The result was that the admirable fourth act, so full of thrilling emotion and in which is the finest moment of *Pauline's* existence, produced little effect. In the famous passage: "*Je crois, je suis chrétienne!*" Mademoiselle Rachel redeemed her credit and found a spark of the spirit of inspiration that had rendered her so successful on

former occasions. Her eye, till then so leaden, suddenly quickened into life; her hitherto unmoved brow seemed to expand, her hands were loosened, her prisoned voice came forth boldly, energetically. With all due respect for the learned men who had undertaken to make a Roman convert to Christianity of the daughter of Israel, it must be owned that their lessons had availed little. It was only when the subject seemed to require the inspiration of the faith which she lacked, that their unbelieving pupil really succeeded in it! Surely the Jewish maiden could not understand the terrible struggles of *Pauline*, far less the miracle of *Grace* which has been the subject of discussion with the most learned doctors of the church! So little had the reality of feeling to do with its expression from her lips.

It was in June of this year that Rachel, or rather her father in her name, consented to go through the departments. Every proposal to do so had hitherto been declined, the sum offered not satisfying the rapacious old man. The remuneration having at length been deemed sufficiently high, Rachel set out for Rouen. Much stress was laid by the press on the choice made of this town, the birthplace of Corneille, for her *début*

in the provinces, and on her announcement that she would delay her first appearance for two days in order that she might make it on the sixth, the anniversary of his birth. The following letter was quoted in all the papers:

“MONSIEUR,

“It is true that a slight indisposition prevents my performing to-morrow (Thursday, 4th of June), but I own also that a far more powerful motive—a sacred duty, in fact—induces me to postpone doing so. The 6th is the anniversary of the birth of the great Corneille, and I would wish to commence my performances on that day. The motive for the delay is surely too praiseworthy to admit of any objection being made.

“I remain, &c., &c.,

“RACHEL.

“To Monsieur Nicolo,\*

“Manager of the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen.”

The *parterre* of Rouen has always been the most celebrated for its severe and unbiassed judgments on the merits of artists of all provincial

\* This gentleman was a brother of the famous composer of that name.

theatres. It refuses to be guided by success won in the capital, and boasts of having hissed Talma himself in his youth. The homage paid by the actress to the genius of whom the Rouennais are justly proud could not fail to produce a favorable impression, and her advisers were good judges. How far, however, the feeling expressed by Mademoiselle Rachel, was genuine, the following little anecdote will shew.

A person as yet unacquainted with the true source of Mademoiselle Rachel's enthusiasm, hearing her speak in such glowing terms of him she was wont to call her *second father*, presented her with a superb medallion of Corneille. The gift was received with becoming gratitude, kissed with fervent raptures, and the donor assured it would never, *never* be parted with.

Some few days after, the credulous gentleman being on a visit to Mr. D——, the celebrated dramatist, mentioned the pleasure he had in presenting the medallion, and the *filial* gratitude expressed on the occasion. Mr. D——, who was then a country neighbour of the celebrated *artiste*, smilingly remarked that it would not be very difficult to obtain this precious *souvenir*. The assertion being indignantly received, Mr. D—— continued: "Nay, I'll wager any amount

I'll shew it you within a month—a week—a day—two hours, and," added Mr. D——, taking a small parcel from a drawer, "do not be too savage, my artless friend, here is the never-to-be-parted-with medallion!"

Mademoiselle's Rachel's filial gratitude had not resisted the temptation to dispose of it where it probably brought her in a larger interest than when in her own possession.

The little farce of respect to the memory of him who, while living on a pension of two thousand francs, wrote the masterpieces that have given millions to Mademoiselle Rachel, was very successful; the public of Rouen repaid in praise and more solid coin the trouble taken to please it.

In Lyons, enthusiasm was at its height; the municipality presented her with a gold crown valued at 7000fr. The continuation of her tour was equally satisfactory.

It was during this visit to Lyons that the following interesting incident is said to have taken place: on one of the off-nights, having dressed very plainly, the young actress, accompanied by a male friend, set out to visit the different parts of the city she had been in the habit of frequenting when she and her sister Sarah were obliged each night to bring home a

certain amount of small coin. A coffee-house in the vicinity of Le Théâtre des Céléstins, one of the minor theatres, was a favorite place of resort with the poor children. On arriving here the emotion of Rachel was very great. Having entered with her companion, they seated themselves at one of the little tables and ordered some refreshment; but she could touch nothing, her eyes were filled with tears, and, finding herself recognised, she hastened home. While on the stage the next evening, she could not help contrasting the present with the past, and reflecting on the difference time had made in the fortunes of the child who once, in that very town, had recited her little fables to careless ears, for the sake of a few sous, doled out more from a feeling of charity than as a reward to repay the pleasure she had imparted, and the young girl to whom a fashionable audience was now listening with wrapt attention, and on whom monarchs hastened to lavish rich gifts.

Rachel had no false pride on the subject of her early penury, and never hesitated to speak of it when the subject was introduced. The person who had kept the *café* where the little street-performers were wont to exercise their talents having retired from business and gone to live in

Paris, called upon Rachel, who received her with open arms.

In a *feuilleton* of the "Constitutionnel," we find *à propos* of the contrasts she sometimes made between the past and the present, the following, related by Mr. Fiorentino :

"At a concert given at the Salle Herz, for some charity, the celebrated *tragédienne* had played in her *toilette de ville* two scenes from 'Phedre,' and had been recalled thrice, by the delighted audience. Several of the lady-patronesses begged she would undertake with them the office of *quêteuse* for the benefit of the poor orphans for whom she had just contributed the aid of her talent. Mademoiselle Rachel then did me the honor to take my arm. The audience was composed of the *élite* of Parisian society, and the velvet bag gracefully presented by the *artiste* was soon filled. She merrily emptied it into my hat each time, saying to the admirers who hastened to present their offering :

" 'Messieurs, I cannot accept less than a louis !'

"The collection amounted to no less than 3000fr. and the *quêteuse* appeared highly delighted with her success ; but as we returned home her countenance suddenly assumed a sad expression :

" 'Such,' said she, 'is the vanity of men ! they



willingly give me a louis now I am rich and celebrated; they refused to give me two sous when I was a poor child dying of hunger!’”

At the expiration of her *congé* Mademoiselle Rachel re-appeared at the Théâtre Français, on the 14th of September. She was seldom required to play during the autumn of this year. Mademoiselle Mars was about to retire from the stage, and the desire to enjoy the privilege of seeing this great actress, filling the house every time she was announced, the managers took advantage of it to reserve Mademoiselle Rachel.

Some efforts were, however, made to resuscitate the classic drama, and to this end, as Joanny was getting old, the *débûts* of Gnyon were much encouraged. The opinions, or rather the laments of the critics during the last four months of 1840 are exceedingly curious, and afford a triumphant refutation to the assertions of those who complain that the Americans lacked taste for the tragic masterpieces imported by Rachel into the States, sixteen years later. *Certes*, if the pecuniary results of her voyage did not satisfy her insatiate brother, Raphael, the Americans were not to blame, they could hardly be expected to exhibit more warmth in honor of the French classic drama than the *élite* of Paris. The public cared

so little for the play itself that whenever the favorite actress or actor was not on the stage every back was turned to it and conversation was resumed as though nothing was being said on the boards. Some excuse might be found for this indifference in the careless manner in which the tragedies were got up; the actors in the secondary parts were perfect sticks, who seemed in a great hurry to get rid of what they had to say—no matter how—and rush off the stage; the accessories were mean to the last degree; dresses, &c., &c., the merest trumpery.

Rachel herself contributed no little to disgust the public with every other actor. Like all stars, she cared for no one else, and endeavored to concentrate on herself the attention of the public to the exclusion of all others. She never played to her fellow-actors on the stage, nor for the sake of bringing into relief the beauties of the play. She kept aloof as much as possible from her companions, never seemed to answer *them* when the scene required it, or to hear them when it was their turn to reply to her. She showed no interest whatever in what was going on about her, but waited until it was her turn to speak, certain to draw upon herself the undivided attention of the audience. This utter indifference

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to the *business* of the stage occasioned the most ridiculous oversights in the most difficult scenes, disheartened the other actors, and completely effected her purpose, which was the same throughout her career, viz., to drive from the stage any person likely to share with her the favor of the public.

On the 22nd of December the "Marie Stuart" of Labrun was revived, with Mademoiselle Rachel as the heroine. Whoever has read the drama will readily perceive the points in which the precocious actress failed, at least on her first attempt.

This problem of history, this mystery of the heart, the solution of which has been vainly sought by each successive generation with never-failing interest, has been divined by one man only. Of the three dramatists, German, Italian, and French, who have ventured to touch the lovely head with its fatal triple crown and its still more fatal coronet of beauty, laid low by the headsman, the first alone has proved worthy to do so. Schiller sought in his own poetical soul as well as in the contradictory pages of history, the elements of the beautiful being he evoked from the obscurity of past ages. He has depicted with admirable skill the hostile meeting of the two great female contemporaries, the contest

between power and beauty—between strength and weakness—between possession and right—the fatal game in which ambition, love, jealousy, and pride shuffled the cards, and life was the forfeit. Political motives were but secondary incentives to the murder of the anointed victim—wounded self-love and irritated vanity sharpened the axe. Schiller well knew a woman only would have invented the torture of depriving her rival of a mirror. The image it reflected was too lovely, it might prove a compensation to all the rigours of fortune and diminish the horrors of captivity. And again, the cool ferocity with which the *gentle* Mary retaliates on her jailor, lacerating her very heart-strings with those same light, fairy fingers of hers, more cruel than the talons of an eagle. The mingled scorn, anger, contempt, and rage, contained in her letter to Elizabeth that has come down to us, in which she alludes to her real or supposed malformation, infirmities, and moral defects, are summed up with consummate skill, in the magnificent scene of the third act, when the exasperated captive, forgetful or careless that she is in the lioness' den, taunts the monster with her own and her mother's iniquities. Perhaps withal the drama falls short of history here, for the

reproaches that *adultery reigns over the people of England and that hypocrisy was its sovereign*, were less offensive to the queen than was the recorded use of the *fistula in the leg* to the woman.

We have all admired the exquisite lines in which poor Marie pours forth her soul when she is permitted, like a bird with a string round its foot, to roam for a moment in apparent freedom.

Faithfully has the German poet followed history, step by step, guessing what the veil of time concealed, and giving new life to those long-buried human passions. One personage, it were to be hoped, was of his own invention, did not his recorded deeds too plainly prove that such a miscreant had existed. A wretch divided between love (?) and ambition—between the royal murderess and her no less regal victim, who during five acts is the servile courtier, the cringing *laquais*, the lover of the daughter of Anna Boleyn, a traitor to two queens, affecting to wish to save Mary of Scotland and counselling her murder, assisting at its perpetration and reporting its details to his bloody mistress, Elizabeth of England! The dramatist has given the true colors of the notorious Earl of Leicester, whom history shews us charged at home with the

murder of two wives—on the field of battle with utter incapacity—at court, with treason. The love of Mary for this man is an incredible invention, but that he became one of her most violent persecutors in revenge for her having contemptuously rejected his homage, is too true.

Such were the materials that Schiller had at his disposal, and well did he use them. The French poet has given but a meagre copy, in which almost every beauty of the original is lost.

In the *rôle* of “Marie Stuart” Rachel was not successful on her first attempt, though she subsequently greatly improved it. The failure may, in a great measure, be attributed to her ignorance of history, and, consequently, of the character, feelings, and manners of the personage she represented, of the age in which she lived, and of the circumstances in which she was placed. It was probably with a view that she should learn these indispensable points that M. de Rémusat presented Mademoiselle Rachel with a magnificent copy of the History of Scotland. On this occasion it was very evident she had not yet opened its gilded pages. The advantage derived from the study of history has been appreciated by

all great actors. Talma studied Tacitus in the morning and acted his heroes in the evening. Lekain was an assiduous student of the ancients. Larozelière used to relate, that calling one morning on Madame Dunénil, he found her in her garden, sitting by a well, reading Suetonius and méditating on the character of Agripina.

Mademoiselle Rachel understood instinctively the violent passions of the imprisoned, vexed, and *worried* Mary; she could not as readily understand the effect of religion on that tempest-tost soul—the calm—the resignation that succeeds to the hurricane.

She could depict with startling truth the maddened queen retaliating with usury the insults heaped upon her and dragging into the dust even the memory of her tormentor's mother; but beyond that rage and that vengeance she saw nothing. She could bear with conscious pride the weight of that triple crown, but she could not discern the block to which she was hastening—that block to which she must soon bend with the dignity of a queen, but also with the resignation of a Christian and a martyr!

When the canopy, the innocent emblem of sovereignty, is torn from Mary's chair, Rachel had

not the slightest idea of the sublime effort with which the queen, subduing her indignation, says : "Place the crucifix here, Melvil, and let us kneel !" Mary herself was twenty years learning the difficult lesson of humility ; it cost Mademoiselle Rachel fourteen years of study to enable her to present this, the fairest side of the picture.

That Mademoiselle Rachel had not sufficiently weighed the sense of the words she uttered was evident in what to some may appear a slight mistake. A good actor, however, is aware of the importance of accessories in keeping up scenic illusion. The unfortunate victim of female tyranny who so bitterly complains of being imprisoned in a dungeon, deprived of rank, power, friends, attendance, and reduced to the veriest want :

*" Dans les murs d'un cachot vous m'avez enfermée  
Dépouillée à la fois de toutes les grandeurs,  
Sans secours, sans amis, presque sans serviteurs  
Au plus vil dénuement dans ma prison réduite."*

This forlorn lady is dressed in a style of gorgeous magnificence, her bodice is stiff with jewels, and some twenty rows of pearl encircle her neck ! This rich dress was accurate as to the fashion of the age, but it was not true to the situation. In the first place it quite eclipsed that of Queen



Elizabeth. It was not probable that the rival who deprived Mary of a mirror would have allowed her to keep such rich attire. The fine dresses of the woman were of course taken from her on the same principal that the sword of an imprisoned man is not left to him. They were her weapons, and as Mary's chief crime was her beauty, Elizabeth was the less likely to forget this precaution. Moreover, this splendour renders Mary less interesting. So beautifully dressed a woman is surely not to be pitied. One might feel resigned to having one's head cut off, but to be obliged to wear an unbecoming cap would indeed be cruel. Mary might forgive the theft of her crown, never that of her dresses!

"Marie Stuart" did little towards consolidating the hold of Mademoiselle Rachel on public opinion. People still remembered the intense feeling with which Mademoiselle Duchesnois had played the same part, and the comparison was not favorable to her successor.

## CHAPTER IX.

1841.

Engagement for One Year signed with the Théâtre Français—Father and Teacher—*Débuts* in England—Victoria to Mademoiselle Rachel—Andromaque mistaken for Hermione—Rachel at Windsor—Return to Paris—Increasing Splendours—Rachel a thorough Cosmopolitan—A Rival!—Contest for the Scenic Sceptre; “Marie Stuart”—Rachel and Elizabeth—Maxime—Phèdre keeping Furnished Lodgings and a *Table d’hôte*.

It has been seen that “Marie Stuart” added nothing then to the reputation of Mademoiselle Rachel. While her partisans still warmly applauded all she did, it was evident that curiosity was no longer excited and enthusiasm had cooled.

The actress herself was much too anxious to secure the renewal of her engagement on such terms as she, or rather her father, deemed she could safely exact to study new parts this year.

60,000 francs per annum and three months' *congé* were the terms she hesitated to accept—that is, over 90,000 francs for one year! \*—the amount paid to Monsieur Guizot to govern the most ungovernable nation on earth!

In the first week of April, however, the engagement was accepted and the treaty for one year signed on the above terms; furthermore, it was agreed that at the close of the year Mademoiselle Rachel should be received *sociétaire* with a *full share* and a fixed salary of 42,000 francs.

Mademoiselle Rachel in the meanwhile had enough to do to please her domestic advisers. Her life was no easy one in this respect. Every scene she studied was learned with the accompaniment of another rather more annoying in its unpoetical reality to the poor girl. The following may be taken as a specimen:—

The word *Toujours*, for instance, is to be spoken in Mademoiselle Rachel's *rôle*. M. Samson advises his pupil to utter it with head erect, loud voice, and firm resolute tone.

“Thus, raising your head, say: ‘*Toujours!*’”

\* 42,000 francs out of the 60,000 were paid her out of the subsidy given by the State—the remainder was the sum her full share as *sociétaire* would bring. It was supposed her *congés* gave over 80,000 francs yearly.

M. Felix, who is present, interposes :

“No, that’s not the way, you must say it mildly; with great feeling; thus, casting your eyes to heaven: Tou—jours!”

M. Samson, (annoyed)—“It must be said authoritatively.”

M. Felix, (getting obstinate)—“It must be spoken tenderly, pathetically.”

M. Samson, (waxing testy)—I am her teacher, and must not be interfered with.”

M. Felix, (quite furious)—“I am her father, and must be obeyed.”

Mademoiselle Rachel, quite bewildered, says the fatal word *toujours*, no matter how. M. Samson thinks he discerns the intonation suggested by father Felix, and becomes indignant :

“You are an ingrate! A pupil who is indebted to me for her success! I’ve done with you; adieu!”

Mademoiselle Rachel, dismayed at having offended her professor, without whom she cannot get along, says *toujours* as he wished she should. There is no misunderstanding her this time, and father Felix, in his turn, flies into a passion :

“You unnatural child! You rebellious daughter!” &c., &c.

Mademoiselle Rachel bursts into tears and the

lesson ends here, for the pupil's sobs prevent her saying *toujours* in any way.

The above, and other similar little dialogues were reported at the time, much to the amusement of the public, and certainly, if not true to the letter, were very true to the tempers and habits of the personages.

That the father contributed by his judicious advice to the success of Rachel is well known. Entirely ignorant of all rules, having perhaps never seen good acting—at least not good *French actors*—before his arrival in Paris, he possessed in the highest degree instinctive dramatic knowledge. Whenever his daughter (in the early part of her career) went to take her lesson, he accompanied her, that he might make her repeat and study at home, which she always did with his assistance. For keen perception of what was right or wrong, where strength, passion, &c., were required, no teacher surpassed him. Had he studied the profession in his youth, he would have attained high excellence in the art.

In order to stimulate the flagging interest of the Parisian public, it was thought advisable to accept the proposal made by Lumley of Her Majesty's Theatre, to play there one month. Nothing that could give *eclat* to her reception

was omitted, and the result was that desired. The new idol was greeted with fanatical admiration. In London she again met the distinguished English to whom she had been introduced in the *salons* of Paris. She was invited into the most aristocratic circles, at Lord Palmerston's, Lady Jersey's, &c. She was everywhere accompanied by her father and her sister Sarah. The perfect tact of the old man stood him in lieu of the qualities he lacked, and besides, the daughter made the father acceptable.

As for Rachel, her unaffected and even dignified simplicity, her modesty and the perfect decorum of her conduct made her a great favorite with the fastidious English aristocracy. The aunts of the Queen condescended to notice her, and she was invited to Windsor, and presented by the duchess of Kent to Her Majesty, who received her very graciously. The usual royal gift was on this occasion a bracelet composed of two wreathed serpents with diamond heads, and bore, graven on the inside, a few words. Those words were subsequently commented on in a variety of ways. It was said, and even reported in the public prints, that the inscription was this: *Victoria to Rachel*. The truth was it stood thus: *Victoria to Mademoiselle Rachel*—the difference of the omission of

a single word making an immense one in the sense.

But it was neither the inscription nor the honor the gift brought that occupied the attention of the recipient, her mind was set on more substantial advantages. She has herself owned that her first impulse was to *feel* the *weight* of the bracelet and thence estimate its *metallic* value!

It was on this occasion that the actress appearing to suffer from cold, the Duchess of Kent is said to have covered her shoulders with a magnificent yellow Indian shawl of her own. This shawl was afterwards taken possession of by mother Felix, on whose shoulders, had it been gifted with consciousness, the magnificent production of the Indian looms must have been rather astonished to find itself.

It was on the 14th of May that Mademoiselle Rachel made her *début* at her Majesty's Theatre. A company of French actors attended her from Paris, and the first tragedy given was "Andromaque." A rather amusing mistake was made this evening by the London audience who had never yet seen the great French actress, but were willing to accept the judgment of the continent *sur parole*. The person who acted the first tragic parts with Rachel was gifted by nature with a very fine person, but was an actress of secondary

capacity. She played *Andromaque* and appeared in the 3rd scene of the 1st act, whereas Rachel as *Hermione* did not come on until the 1st scene of the 2nd act. The audience, who were anxiously awaiting the entrance of Rachel, seeing this fine-looking *Andromaque*, took it for granted that this was the phenomenon of the day, and greeted her with thunders that quite bewildered Mademoiselle Larcher, who was unaccustomed to such a reception. The ovation was prolonged to the close of the first act, and when the real object of this enthusiasm came on, but few hands were raised to welcome her. The truth was, however, soon rumoured, and the homage transferred to its legitimate object.

Every movement of Mademoiselle Rachel was duly chronicled by the press. An indisposition with which she was seized at a *soirée* of Lady Cardigan's on the 1st of June was reported with extravagant lamentations and her recovery with as extravagant joy. Her re-appearance on the 8th of June was greeted as though she had escaped from the tomb. The queen and queen-dowager were present.

On the 14th of June Mademoiselle Rachel arrived at the Castle Hotel in Windsor, where apartments had been prepared for her. She had



come in order to assist at a *fête* given by the queen, the particulars of which were reported in the papers of the day. A splendid banquet, to which were invited one hundred and two guests, preceded the performances. Among the superb plate of the crown displayed, were the Indian trophies the English nation has lately paid for so dearly; the magnificent tiger's head, known as the footstool of Tippoo Saïb, the splendid peacock adorned with precious stones of immense value, and also the shield of Achilles. On the right and left of the immense buffet, on which this wealth of nations was displayed, hung the blue banners of Tippoo Saïb, adorned with pearls and jewels of great value.

The theatrical and musical entertainment of the evening was presented in the following order :

I.

First act of "*Bajazet*."

Overture of Count d'Egmont.

II.

Third act of "*Marie Stuart*."

March of Harold.

III.

Fourth act of "*Andromaque*."

Symphony of Mozart.

God save the queen !

During Mademoiselle Rachel's stay in London, negotiations were set on foot for an engagement to play in Spain, but they were not carried through.

Mademoiselle Rachel took her leave of a London audience on the 20th July, in the part of *Camille*. Every formula of praise was exhausted by the press on this occasion, as on the preceding ones. According to the *on dits* of the day her triumph had been extended to the heart of the manager, who is said to have offered her his hand. If the offer was made it was not accepted, and Mademoiselle Rachel left England on her way to Bordeaux on the 22nd of July, and arrived in that city on the 1st of August.

We have hitherto followed Mademoiselle Rachel more especially in her professional career; we have now before us a more arduous task, we are to speak of her as the woman in her social sphere—a delicate subject at all times, since it compels us to invade the sanctuary of private life and reveal its mysteries to a prying public, but more especially so in the present case.

We will endeavour to fulfil this task, nothing extenuating nor setting down aught in malice, in as far as it is consistent with conscientious biography, to report the words and actions of its subject.

But there are grounds it is not our province to touch upon, grounds that are beyond the limits of even the morbid curiosity that eagerly seeks to find in every great work that issues from the Divine hand the contaminating touch of the genius of evil; grounds where the truth is too obscure to be distinguished from fable, and where, even if known, it would afford no better clue to character, would convey no lesson, prevent no fall. If, then, those who delight in the scandalous revelations of the foibles of poor human nature have taken up this book with the hope of finding in it a detailed account of the numerous *liaisons* attributed, whether justly or not, to this celebrated woman, and the innumerable scandalous anecdotes that have been circulated with regard to her and her supposed admirers, we warn them they had better throw it down at once, as nothing so piquant seasons its matter-of-fact pages. Whatever is necessary to convey an idea of the character, temper, and inclinations, especially in all that has any connection with her talent as an actress, we are bound to offer to the reader so far as we have it in our power—further we have nothing to add from the garrulous *chronique scandaleuse* of the day.

On her return from London and Bordeaux, where, in addition to the golden harvests she had

reaped, her stay had been marked daily by rich tokens of individual admiration, the apartment in the Passage Vérot Dodat could no longer accord with her position. A handsome apartment, rue du Luxembourg, near the Tuileries, was taken and furnished richly. Here Rachel had a suite of rooms to herself, separated from those occupied by the rest of the family, the apartment being divided by the landing-place, and each side having a *salon*, bedrooms, &c. The younger girls, Rebecca and Leah, were placed in boarding schools. It was while residing in this apartment that Rachel first owned a carriage; it was the gift of a co-religionist, M. Cremieux, a brother of the celebrated advocate and minister of the provisional government.

The success of Rachel abroad seemed a triumphant refutation of the criticisms of the fault-finders at home. The enthusiasm of her audiences had loaded her with crowns, poetical effusions, and—what to her was most welcome of all—money. In these visits to foreign countries and departmental tours the vanity of the woman and the avarice of the Jewess were fully gratified, while the *artiste* had no criticisms to dread. In Paris praise was lavishly awarded when deserved, but impartial and severe criticism visited every error and held up in glaring colors every false step, every

failure. The capital of good taste, the admitted arbitress of merit, considers her slightest commendations equal to all the more lightly-bestowed praise of less competent judges, and when she has adopted a child of genius she is jealously exacting and permits of no slight to herself or preference being shown for other towns. Throughout the whole of her career Rachel proved herself a thorough cosmopolitan; she went, she stayed, where she was paid most. In her heart there appeared to be no place for gratitude; her idol was gold, and whenever that lure was held out she hastened to grasp it, regardless of all previous claims upon her services.

The result of this conduct was that the Parisians lost all affection for her, and that, after every absence, it required all her talent and an extraordinary degree of exertion on her part to reconquer her place. Talma and Mademoiselle Mars, those darlings of the Parisian public, never sacrificed their duties at the Théâtre Français to any offer made them elsewhere. Whatever the advantages to be reaped abroad they returned faithfully at the appointed time, and never failed to show themselves prouder of the favor of the capital than of that of any potentate. Thus it was that when after every *congé* they re-appeared on the Parisian stage, the

delight of the audience was manifested in the most enthusiastic manner. When Rachel reappeared at long intervals after her erratic flights and capricious fits of sullenness she was received with stern, cold silence.

Mademoiselle Rachel experienced this for the first time on her return to Paris this year. There was, moreover, something far more to be dreaded ; there was a rival. The management, whether to lower the presumption and consequently the claims of the reigning star, or with a view of securing a second resource in case the first should fail, had brought out a competitor. Among the zealous supporters of the *débutante* was Jules Janin, the once enthusiastic partisan of Rachel. The enthusiasm which the new object of his admiration excited found vent in the most rhapsodical tirades that ever fell from his pen.

The *rôle* attempted by the daring candidate was the most arduous, perhaps, in the whole classic *repertoire*, the masterpiece of Racine, one that Rachel had not yet dared to act, that she only attempted three years afterwards, and only succeeded in ten years later—*Phèdre*. In this god-descended and goddess-cursed queen every human passion is carried beyond human strength ; she revolves in a fiery sphere incomprehensible to orderly every-day

people. In that tortured heart there is a turmoil of wild, contradictory elements, striving for the mastery such as no mere earth-born creature could withstand. Quenchless love and poignant grief, hope and despair in their most frenzied extremes, rend the stronghold of vitality, till, weary of the strife, the vexed soul rushes into eternity. Yet, repulsive as would seem the incestuous step-dame, the adulterous wife, whose perjured breath stirs the lowest depths of hell and evokes the demons of murder and ruin, the great, the indispensable condition of the *rôle* is that our pity be excited for this victim of the implacable destiny of antiquity. We are to forget the murdered son ; neither his innocence nor his terrible death, to narrate which the poet has exhausted the rich treasures of his art, should absorb our interest, our sympathy—our pity should centre in the murderess.

This character, then, which consummate actresses had spent years in learning, and attempted with fear and trepidation, was confided to a neophyte. Of the efforts made to sustain her the following is a proof:—

“This is, indeed, the *Phèdre* of Racine. The very sight of her reveals the woman who is courageous, energetic, and passionate beyond measure \* \* \* \* She comes on the stage

like a desperate creature ; nothing dazzles, nothing stops her. What she is to say is there, in her head, in her soul ; but she will say it according to the inspiration of the moment. If she says it as she should, so much the better.

\* \* \* \* \* Mademoiselle Maxime has triumphed in this most arduous experiment. Her head is full of energy, her look, of animation ; she has a fine voice that no exertion wearies, ready tears, simple and natural gestures. *She* does not play with Racine's verses as a child does with a hoop ; *she* does not endeavor to concentrate all the tragedy in herself and exclude the actor who plays with her from the favor of the public—that favor which is his sun ; on the contrary, she *listens* well ; she assists the efforts of those around her ; she does not declaim, she acts. \* \* \* We have found a *Phèdre* at last. Go and see her ; go and applaud her ; go and defend her. She is alone, without support, without coterie, without protection, left to her own true instincts, &c., &c."

For some months Jules Janin endeavored to support this rival to Mademoiselle Rachel, forgetting, while he instituted comparisons so insulting to his quondam idol, that he insulted his own former judgments and invalidated any future ones he might make.



In October Mademoiselle Rachel re-appeared in the rôle of *Camille*. She was received, as we have already said, without the slightest token of favor, and commenced her part amid icy silence. The public seemed to say: "You may leave us if it pleases you; but, we may also forget you. Beware, for absence is always dangerous." The actress bent every nerve to the task of winning back her audience, and was finally recalled at the close of the 4th act, amid thunders of applause.

Among the reproaches addressed to the *tragédienne*, this re-entrance at the close of the 4th act to be applauded by the public, was one of the most just; but it might be with equal reason addressed to the audience who permitted so flagrant a violation of good taste. In England the 5th act was omitted and the tragedy ended with the death of *Camille*. The insult to the author, the contempt shown to the other actors, was certainly not so gross in this case as when the play was continued after the resurrection of *Camille*. This resurrection destroys all illusion and takes away all interest from the last act, and the result was that hardly any one stayed to hear it. This affords a further proof that the classic drama is dead in France and that no one cares in reality for Corneille and Racine.

On the 25th of October the performance of "Marie Stuart" brought the two rivals before the public in the same play and in characters that allowed each to vent openly all the stifled rage, indignation, and hatred to which their rivalry gave rise. The foes were brought face to face and a seemingly fair field was given them to contend for the favor of the public. The original struggle for mastery between the real personages of history could hardly have been more desperate than the modern one between these two mock queens; each put forth all the power that nature and art had given her to crush the other and secure to herself the scenic sceptre. The passions that were roused, the emotions that were excited among their partisans were, in a narrow compass, no less fierce and violent than those of the drama. In comparison with the great contest recorded in history, this in truth was a tempest in a punch-bowl; yet each competitor felt that her prospects in life, her very existence, was staked upon the issue.

Every time poor Maxime appeared, one portion of the house maintained a disdainful silence; a tacit condemnation which her own few but brave partisans retorted to the full whenever Rachel came on. Both camps anxiously awaited

the decisive 3rd act. It amply justified their solicitude. The silence that reigned throughout the house was almost oppressive. *Elizabeth*—*Maxime*—pale, disheartened, seeing too well the tide was against her, feeling instinctively she was doomed, knowing her incapacity to resist or escape the impending avalanche, trembled with impotent rage. Every word she uttered revealed the bitterness and grief of her burthened heart. *Marie Stuart*—*Rachel*—on her side, passive and motionless, accepted all the withering contumely heaped upon her; with bent head, folded arms, and steady, calm, glittering eye, she waited—waited patiently—but there was something so appalling, so deadly in the look, that a shudder went through the audience; everyone felt that the patience was that of the tiger secure of his prey, who has noted the very place where his fangs will be thrust into the quivering flesh of the victim. When, at last, it was her turn to speak, the very ones who had expected the explosion were thunderstruck. No pen can render the frenzied passion, the terrific vehemence, the scorching indignation with which she poured forth her pent-up fury. Her voice, lately so weak and exhausted, strengthened by her imperious will, hurled forth anathemas that fell like sledge-ham-

mers on the crushed Maxime, who, breathless, amazed, terrified beyond measure, gazed at her with wild eyes. The scene was magnificent and beggars description. No one could have believed such meaning could be given to the pale, meagre, wishy-washy translation of Lebrun; no one ever suspected the strength, the fire contained in Rachel. Her irritated self-love had developed all her resources; she had attained every perfection save one, the most prized, most valuable—tears. True tenderness, real feeling, have their source in the heart; they do not spring from self-love and irritated vanity.

The defeat of Maxime was too complete to be denied, even by the critic who had so loudly proclaimed her superiority, but he palliated his want of judgment, and softened her fall, by alleging that the character was unsuited to her, as her chief gift was the power of expressing feeling, pathetic sentiment, and the rôle of *Elizabeth* permitted nothing of the kind. Had she acted *Marie Stuart* and Rachel, *Elizabeth* the exit would have been different. There might certainly have been a great deal of truth in saying that had the rôles been reversed Maxime would have been more in her element, and Rachel still in her own, but never could the former have made the scale

incline on her side when matched with such an adversary.

Her triumph cost Mademoiselle Rachel an indisposition that prevented the repetition of this exciting scene.

All attempt at rivalry was at an end. Mademoiselle Maxime sank at once into insignificance, and although she remained ten years on the stage, the public never took any especial notice of her. She is now keeping an *hotel garni*, rue de la Michodière, in Paris. *Phèdre* lets furnished lodgings, with board if required.

## CHAPTER X.

1842.

The "Cid"—The Chimène of the French Stage; the Ximena of Ancient Spain and the Creation of Mademoiselle Rachel — "Ariane" — La Champmeslé — Mademoiselle Clairon—Return to London—Disappointment—Success in Belgium—30,000 francs in eleven nights—Corneille's Anniversary a Failure—Return to Paris—"Frédégonde."

THREE revivals were presented during the course of this year by Mademoiselle Rachel; the "Cid" of Pierre Corneille, the "Ariane" of his brother, Thomas Corneille, and the "Frédégonde et Brunehaut" of Lemer cier. The selection of all these tragedies could not have been more unfortunate; in the first instance with regard to the want of proper preparation on the part of the actress, in the other instances with regard to the plays themselves.

The "Cid" was given on the 19th of January.

We have said elsewhere that Corneille's female characters were, with the exception of that of *Chimène* very inferior to his heroes. To find this exquisitely beautiful, passionate and eloquent maid, this noble heart divided between love and duty, yet never for a moment sacrificing one to the other, uniting strength and gentleness, anger and forgiveness, pride and grief, the burning love of a woman, the thirst for vengeance of a Castilian daughter—this being, lovely as she is terrible, yet, whether in her extreme of grief or her extreme of rage, commanding respect and admiration, inspiring love, and sympathy—to find this, the noblest creature ever created by the divine breath, Corneille had to seek in a heroic age, in a land of chivalry. The age of gallantry, the brilliant court of Louis XIV., its galaxy of lovely dames afforded no such model.

The cause of the quarrel between the two fathers that forms the basis of the plot, is taken from the old ballads of the "Cid," the spirit of which has been so faithfully given in Southey's version.

"In those days arose Rodrigo of Bivar, who was a youth strong in arms and of good customs; and the people rejoiced in him, for he be-

stirred himself to protect the land from the Moors.

“At this time it came to pass that there was strife between the Lord of Gormaz and Diego Laynez, the father of Rodrigo; and the count insulted Diego and gave him a blow. Now Diego was a man in years and his strength had passed from him, so that he could not take vengeance, and he retired to his house to dwell there in solitude and lament over his dishonor. And he took no pleasure in his food, neither could he sleep by night, nor would he lift his eyes up from the ground, nor stir out of his house, nor commune with his friends, but turned from them in silence, as if the breath of his dishonor would taint them. Rodrigo was yet but a youth, and the count was a mighty man in arms, and one who gave his voice first in the Cortes, and was held to be the best in war, and so powerful that he had a thousand friends among the mountains. Howbeit, all these things appeared as nothing to Rodrigo when he thought of the wrong done to his father, the first that had ever been offered to the blood of Lain Calvo. He asked nothing but justice of Heaven, and of man a fair field; and his father, seeing of how good heart he was, gave him his sword and his blessing. The sword had been the



sword of Mudarra in former times, and when Rodrigo felt its cross within his hands he thought within himself that his arm was not weaker than Mudarra's. And he went out and defied the count and slew him, and smote off his head and carried it home to his father. The old man was sitting at table, the food lying before him untasted, when Rodrigo returned, and pointing to the head that hung from his horse's collar dropping blood, he bade him look up, for there was the herb that would restore to him his appetite; the tongue, quoth he, which insulted you, is no longer a tongue, and the hand which wronged you is no longer a hand. And the old man arose and embraced his son, and placed him above him at the table, saying, that he who brought him that head should be the head of the house of Lain Calvo."

Whatever Corneille added to the original text was true to the spirit, if not to the letter, and in all points conforming to the feelings, customs, and manners of the age and country. This splendid theme dressed in his magnificent poetry constitutes a drama that has no equal.

The character of the lovers, whatever may have been said to the contrary, has nothing that is false, too highly colored, or unnatural. Their

feelings, words, and actions are perfectly in keeping with the times. A severe but judicious French critic of the beginning of this century, Geoffroy, errs sadly when he criticises the conduct of Chimène, who repairs to Court in deep mourning to demand justice of the King. He says that neither honor nor duty required that a young girl, whose father had been killed, should ostentatiously display at Court her mourning and her grief, and loudly demand the blood of the murderer. The king is aware of the combat, he knows the murderer, he is wise and just. Chimène may trust to him the case of punishing or forgiving. Geoffroy adds that his reflection is merely in a moral sense, not in a literary one, and that what is extravagant according to the laws of honesty and propriety is admirable in a dramatic and poetic sense; that the stranger the character of Chimène, the more it is brilliant and theatrical.

This is not the place to refute the opinions of Geoffroy as to the light in which he considers theatricals and their object, but the opinion of the conduct of Corneille's heroine proves that the celebrated critic has never given much time to the study of the early history of nations. This clamorous demand for vengeance carried to the

foot of the throne, in all the pomp of woe, by the widow and children of the murdered, is so frequent in the annals of every European people that innumerable instances might be quoted. One in much later times related by Monstrelet will serve the present purpose. Speaking of the events that followed the murder of the Duke of Orleans, in 1407, by order of the Duke of Burgundy, the old chronicler says:

“On the tenth day of December the Duchess of Orleans, widow to the late duke, with her youngest son John, and accompanied by the late Queen of England, now wife to her eldest son, set out for Paris. The King of Sicily, the Dukes of Berry and Bourbon, the Counts of Clermont and Vendôme, the Lord Charles d’Albret, constable of France, and many other great lords, went out of the town to meet her, attended by a number of people and horses, and thus escorted her to the Hotel de St. Pol, where the King resided. Being instantly admitted to an audience, she fell on her knees to the King, and made a pitiful complaint to him of the very inhuman murder of her lord and husband. The King, who at that time was in his sound senses,

having lately recovered from his illness, raised her up with tears and assured her he would comply with all her request, according to the opinion of his council.

\* \* \* \* \*

“On the Wednesday after St. Thomas’s day, the Duchess of Orleans, accompanied by her youngest son, the Queen Dowager of England, her daughter-in-law, the Chancellor of Orleans, and others of her council, and many of the knights and esquires who had been of the household of the late duke, all clothed in black, came to the Hotel of St. Pol, to have an audience of the King. She found there the King of Sicily, the Dukes of Berry and Bourbon, the Chancellor of France, and several others who, having demanded an audience for her of the King, instantly obtained it. She was led into the presence by the Count d’Alençon, and with many tears, and before all the princes, again supplicated the King that he would do her justice to those who had traitorously murdered her lord and husband, the late Duke of Orleans.

“Upon this the Duchess, her son John, and the Queen Dowager of England, her daughter-in-law, cast themselves on their knees before the King, and with abundance of tears supplicated him to

remember to do good justice on the perpetrators of the murder of his brother."

The chief merit of Corneille, and herein he proved himself superior even to Shakespeare, was, that he followed the model he had chosen in all its details of time and place, and never suffered an anachronism to destroy the scenic illusion. With heart and head full of the historic and legendary lore of Spain, he drew the portrait of a fitting mate for him who, to this day, has remained the representative of the extinct virtues of a past age—of a woman worthy to share the fortunes of Rodrigo del Bivar, the "Cid Campeador."

In the "Romances del Cid" we have a most accurate picture of the age. Many of its customs, as there related, may still be traced in remote nooks of some of the provinces, where, alone, alas! some few vestiges of Spain yet survive. The French dramatist made admirable use of his rich materials, giving at times in two lines the true spirit and full effect of the feelings and sentiments that in their original form, however powerful in their quaint expression, were inadmissible on a modern stage. For instance, when the insulted old man tries the muscles and courage of his son, the whole point of the scene is

rendered in that oft-quoted and splendid passage :

“Rodrigue, as tu du cœur ?  
Tout autre que mon père  
L'épronverait sur l'heure.”

The remainder of the scene is almost literally taken from the ballads. It is a pity that the great poet who did such strict justice to his fine models did not bring in the characteristic passage of the ballad wherein *Rodrigo* addresses his sword—the sword of *Mudarra*—and which ends with the following lines :

“Thou hast found, oh, noble sword, a second master ; should'st thou e'er be vanquished I'll hide the shame of thy dishonored blade, even to the hilt, in my breast.”

Of all the characters undertaken by Mademoiselle Rachel, this proved the most complete failure,—a failure, too, which she never redeemed by any after excellence in it. Nature had not unfitted her for it, but gross ignorance of the character prevented her success. Even those actresses who have attained a high degree of eminence in their art have misconceived the part of *Chimène*. They have invariably presented a woe-begone, tearful maid, whom filial

duty compels to demand the death of her lover, but who does so very reluctantly, and is ready to unseal her words as soon as uttered. Modern critics ascribed the failure of Rachel to the lack of pathos, and renewed the reproach that she was incapable of expressing the warmth of feeling, the moving tenderness of a child of the sunny South. *Chimène* is no more a child of the South than of the North; she is a being of an age and land known to us only through tradition. Far from being the weeping, love-sick, lack-a-daisical creature the French stage has always presented, her unshed tears fall back on her heart in burning showers. Corneille chose his heroine among the Spanish women of the olden time, and, unfortunately, Rachel had never heard of them. The ancient Romanceros and Cancioneros, the traditions and legends of Spain, its history tinged with the rainbow hues of romance, had never excited her imagination, accelerated the beat of her heart, or brought sympathetic tears to her eyes. Her cold calm pulse had never throbbed the faster as she read of the struggles of the magnanimous Castilian, defending his religion and re-conquering, inch by inch, the land of his fathers from his no less noble Moorish foes. Their deeds of brilliant valor and devoted

patriotism had found no responsive echo in her soul. Yet, without these sympathetic emotions, the part of *Chimène* or that of *Rodrigo* is impossible. No matter how remote the action, the actor must identify himself with the personage. It may be doubted, indeed, if Mademoiselle Rachel had ever heard of the "Cid" before she—we will not say learned—but *committed to memory* the rôle of his betrothed. She went blindly to the task without the slightest idea of the preparatory studies indispensable to its performance—without the least conception of the motives that influenced the will or determined the actions of a high-born Spanish maiden of the eleventh century to whom honor was the breath of life. She was wholly incapable of understanding the soul-tortures of her who demands of the king the death of her lover for the death of her father, even while her own bleeding heart acknowledges the justice of the deed, even while her own lips confess that had he acted otherwise she would have scorned the craven! Yet, of these terrible sacrifices of the dearest affections to the inexorable laws of honor, instances are frequent in the annals of Spain. Mrs. Hemans chose a still more fearful one as the theme of her "Siege of Valencia," a father dooming his two innocent



sons to death rather than give up to the besiegers the town his king has entrusted to him.

To understand that the customs of the age made it highly honorable for *Chimène* to forego her vengeance subsequently, and become the wife of him who had killed her father, Rachel should have read the ballad :

“ Maté à tu padre Ximena,  
 Pero no á desquizado,  
 Matéle de hombre á hombre  
 Para vengar cierto agravio,  
 Maté hombre y hombre doy,  
 Aquiestoy á tu mandado,  
 Yen lugar del muerto padre  
 Cobraste marido honrado.”

“I killed thy father, *Ximena*, but not in treacherous wise. I killed him man to man, to avenge a certain grief. I killed a man, a man I give. Therefore stand I at thy command, and for thy father dead, an honored husband offer.”

If *Chimène* is right in demanding her lover's life for her father's, she is also justified in forgiving him. *Rodrigo* offers her, in accordance with the customs of the age, the blood of conquered Moors in expiation of her father's.

Rachel had neither the gait, the look nor the

voice of her who boldly reminds her sovereign that :

“Rey que no haste justicia  
Non debia de reinare,  
Ni cabalgar en caballo  
Ni espuela de oro calzár.”

“The king that grants not justice deserveth not to reign, nor should he steed bestride, nor wear a golden spur.”

Yet who better than Rachel could have uttered the commanding appeal of the spirited daughter of Count Gormaz ?

Even for her dress Rachel would have done well to have consulted the costumes of the eleventh century, so minutely described in those same old ballads. Her attire, especially the pink gown of the first act, would not have presented so pitiful an anachronism.

The result of all this ignorance and presumption was that, at the finest passage of the *rôle*, a noisy and energetic protest, mingled with hisses, greeted the injudicious applause with which her partisans endeavoured to sustain the actress. A dead silence succeeded.

Thus once more fell the play that has done so much honor to Corneille, the masterpiece, the original success of which so nettled the jealousy

of the Cardinal de Richelieu that, according to Fontenelle *he would rather have seen the Spaniards at the gates of Paris*. Mademoiselle Rachel might, with good reason, have said: *Meâ culpâ, meâ maximâ culpâ!* She had acted neither the traditional *Chimène* of the French stage, nor the chivalrous *Ximena* of the Spanish legends—she had presented a pale, wishy-washy nondescript no modern public would accept, and which the *Cid* certainly never would have recognized.

The “*Ariane*” of Thomas Cornaille was revived on the 7th of May. No two dramas could differ more essentially than did the one Mademoiselle Rachel had so lately failed in and this one. “*Ariane*” is as dull, as stupid, as full of improbable actions and impossible situations, as replete with lame, halting, hollow, vapid, wretched poetry, without rhyme, and, *certainly*, without reason, and as full of grammatical errors, as the “*Cid*” is interesting, energetic, natural, and full of magnificent passages.

This dull, insipid elegy contains nothing heroic, noble, or dramatic. The desertion of *Theseus* is almost justified by the contempt we feel for the heroine, than whom a more unworthy was never chosen by an author. The little interest there is is concentrated in *Ariadne*, but the

very few fine passages cannot compensate the monotony of her long lamentations or the insignificance of the other *dramatis personæ*. The play was indebted for its success, when first brought out in 1672, to the celebrated Mademoiselle de Champmeste, who played the part of *Ariadne*. Of this actress and of the tragedy Madame de Sevigne has left us the following opinion:

“La Champmeste is something so extraordinary that in your life you never saw her equal; it is the actress we seek and not the play. I have seen “*Ariane*” for the sake of La Champmeste only. The play is insipid, the players wretched; but when La Champmeste comes in a murmur is heard, everybody is in raptures; her despair makes every one weep.”

This charming actress, among whose devoted admirers were the greatest poets of her time—this idol to whom La Fontaine dedicated his tale of “*Belphegor*,” and whom he praised in lines such as he alone could write—for whom Racine wrote several of his masterpieces—la Champmeste had neither education nor natural wit. Perhaps with her illustrious friends this ignorance may not have been the least of her attractions. Having enquired of Racine whence he had taken the

subject of "Athalie," he answered, from the "Old Testament." "You had better have taken it from the 'New,'" said she; "it would have been more fashionable."

She remained on the stage, exciting admiration and enthusiasm, to her death, at the age of fifty-seven, in 1698. Shortly before she died, some one attempting to bring her mind to the serious contemplation of the future state she was about entering, she replied: "O! well, well, if Paradise be so pleasant a place, there is, no doubt, a theatre, and in that case God the Father will not be sorry to see me make my *débüt* there."

A century later another stage celebrity, Mademoiselle Clairon, endeavored to reconcile the forsaken *Ariadne* with the public; with what success may be judged by the reply the actress made to a lord of the bedchamber who was complaining that the curtain was allowed to fall at the fourth act: "*Ma foi, monseigneur,*" said she, "I would like to see what sort of countenance you would have in the fifth act if you had been hissed without cessation during the preceding ones." Yet Mademoiselle Clairon was beautiful, and not only talented in her profession, but of excellent and well-cultivated intellect. Of

the effect she produced in even so poor a part the following anecdote is told.

She was speaking the passage in which *Ariadne*, in doubt as to who is the rival that has robbed her of *Theseus*' heart, says :

“Est ce Mégiste Eglé qui le rend infidèle ?”

when a man from the pit loudly exclaimed : “It's Phèdre, its that — of a Phèdre.” Though coarse in its expression, this confirmation of the illusion her acting produced was not a little gratifying to the actress.

What her predecessors, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had failed in accomplishing, Mademoiselle Rachel was not more fortunate in achieving in the nineteenth.

Yet, with all its defects, the tragedy of Thomas Corneille offered in the subject so great an analogy with the “*Andromaque*” of Racine, that the actress whose most successful rôle had always been the part of *Hermione*, found herself at home in that of *Ariadne*. A critic of the day remarked that her slight figure, her pale brow, her deep set black eyes, her nervous, feverish demeanor, her small head, reminding the spectator of that of a viper standing erect on its tail, her bitter smile, her nostrils swollen with disdain, her ferocity of tone and her explosions of rage, bore certainly no

resemblance to the Melpomene of antiquity, that grand and noble figure whose beauty no excess of grief can alter, and who, even as she falls stabbed to the heart, is mindful of the graceful folds of her tunic, even in the last convulsion of her agony. Yet all these distinguishing characteristics contributed only to the partial success of the forsaken bride of *Theseus*. Mademoiselle Rachel did her utmost to sustain the play, and it certainly required all her talent and the greatest exertions to make it acceptable. The selection of this wretched piece was very unfortunate, and it will be seen that her next revival was no less so.

With "Ariane" closed the Parisian season of 1842, and in July Mademoiselle Rachel hastened back to London, where she hoped for triumphs that would compensate the decrease of her popularity at home. But some little matters had come to light since her last trip that had greatly lessened the esteem in which she was once held there ; the novelty, too, was gone, the enthusiasm had gone down somewhat, and to Mademoiselle Rachel's great disappointment she found her star pale before the two planets, Bouffé and Déjazet, who in succession crossed the Channel this year.

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Rather disgusted with the fickleness of her English public, and annoyed that she should have to share the favor she had hitherto enjoyed alone, Rachel soon left for Antwerp, where she arrived on the 17th of July.

The most brilliant success attained by Rachel was that she had this year in Brussels. The first night the house brought in 7,500fr.; the second, 8,300fr. Total, 15,800fr. in two evenings.

The following table will shew how great were the pecuniary advantages Mademoiselle Rachel derived from her *congés*.

She arrived in Brussels on the evening of the 18th of July and left that city to return to Paris on the 31st of August. In that time she performed twelve nights. These twelve nights put more than 30,000fr. in the pocket of the celebrated actress. With the addition of three scenes performed in Ghent on the 24th of August it will be seen that the forty-four days she spent in Belgium averaged more than 800fr. each, or, counting only the twelve nights she played, each performance brought her in 2,500fr.

The Théâtre Français undertook to celebrate this year the anniversary of Corneille's birth. The plays given were "Le Cid" and "Le Menteur." The bust of Corneille was crowned on



the stage. The *fête* might be called a family one; as the name of Mademoiselle Rachel was not on the bills, the public, who cared for the great master only when he was interpreted by her, kept away, and the receipts did not exceed 500fr. ! When Mademoiselle Mars retired, the admirers of Molière mourned his masterpieces as for ever exiled from the stage. At the death of Talma, Corneille and Racine became forgotten gods until the fire was rekindled on their altars by Mademoiselle Rachel. On the sixth of June this year, the young priestess had carried her gods and their worship elsewhere, and the Parisians did not even notice that this celebration of Corneille's birthday was a novelty. The following year when the day came she was in Rouen, and the Théâtre Français refrained from attempting to shew to the memory of Corneille a homage that in that deserted house was equivalent to an insult. It was not until the year 1844, when Mademoiselle Rachel was in Paris, that the celebration of this day was regularly instituted.

The re-appearance of Mademoiselle Rachel in September was effected very quietly, without any of the usual attempts to ensure a brilliant reception. Her friends argued very judiciously that these efforts should be reserved for the cases

in which they were really necessary, but that in the present one the fame the actress had acquired abroad heralded with sufficient *eclat* her appearance at home. Whenever signs of coolness were visible on the Parisian horizon, the tongues of rumour were set to work to excite a new sensation, puffs, bulletins, private correspondence published for the benefit of the public, &c., &c., all the resources of the art of getting up an excitement were made use of.

The tragedy of "*Frédégonde et Brunchaut*" of Mr. Lemercier was announced as being in rehearsal and excited great expectations from the opinion then prevailing that the rôle of *Frédégonde* was particularly well adapted to Rachel's powers. This was a great mistake. Rachel had been all her life the organ of the great classic poets; accustomed to the majesty, the measured dignity, the pomp and grandeur of the sonorous Alexandrine, her clear, distinct enunciation brought out every beauty in bold relief, but, unfortunately, it did the same with every fault. She had not acquired the art of disguising errors, strengthening weak points, and gliding over unpardonable ones, of concealing under the warmth and vivacity of delivery the meagreness of the author's style. The wretched poetry of "*Frédégonde*,"

was absolutely unbearable uttered by the lips of Mademoiselle Rachel ; and this attempted resurrection added a third failure to the unfortunate experiments of this year. Yet the subject of this tragedy was one that offered abundant materials to a clever pen. Modern authors continue to seek in the worn annals of Greece and Rome their plot and *dramatis personæ*, neglecting the inexhaustible stores the history of their own country affords ; and when they do attempt any one of its fertile subjects, there seems to be a fatality attached to them—the execution is so poor, the poetical garb so mean, the accessories introduced are in such bad taste that they manage to despoil the theme of every original beauty. “Frédégonde et Brunchaut,” “Jeanne d’Arc,” and others, have been proofs of this.

## CHAPTER XI.

1843.

First Step in Life as a Free Woman—A Portrait *au moral et au physique*—Corroboratory Anecdotes—Mademoiselle Ave-  
 uel—The Cash-box—The Fascination of Gold on Different  
 Minds—Making Collections—Expensive Fancies—The  
 Guitar.

IT was in the rue de Luxembourg that the long looked-for hour of Rachel's majority at last dawned. The first use she made of her enfranchisement was to loosen the paternal gripe that had hitherto been fastened on her earnings. There was good reason for her impatience in this instance. Though her talent and constant and fatiguing exertions had raised the family to a position which, compared with the one they previously held, was very brilliant; though her younger sisters and her brother were being educated at her expense, and though her money clothed, housed, and fed them all, the old man allowed her out of her handsome salary but 300fr.

per month, for her dress, theatrical costumes, and pocket money! The sum was altogether inadequate to her requirements, and this grievance had occasioned frequent bickerings, all to no avail, until the day arrived when the father knew he had no legal right to dispose of his daughter's property. Even then there was a violent quarrel on the subject, and the upshot was that Rachel marched out of the house, taking nothing but what she had on, and installed herself in an apartment on the Quai Voltaire, which she furnished handsomely, leaving to her parents all the furniture of that of the rue de Luxembourg.

The decisive step Rachel had taken was attributed by the family to the advice of a male friend whose influence was then very great with her, and fearful that this influence might be extended still further to their prejudice, they took an early opportunity to break the friendly tie. Surrounded as she was, this was no difficult matter; vanity and love of conquest on one side, jealousy on the other, afforded excellent grounds, and the friends parted to meet no more for ten years, when they met again under peculiarly sad circumstances, each having been recently bereaved of a most dear friend.

Though the scene of separation from her re-

latives had been very violent, the reconciliation was soon effected. The fugitive was too valuable a member of the family for any rupture to be of long duration. Rachel, too, was never unkind to her parents. Whatever were the faults of her race, nature, or education, whatever errors she may have fallen into, her generosity towards all the members of her family, particularly towards her father and mother, has been unceasing. She left them all the apartment they lived in contained, and gave her father a pension of 12,000fr. and to her mother, for her private use, one of 4,000fr.; these sums were paid yearly with great regularity. Besides these pensions she was always lavish of gifts to all the members of her family; repeatedly paying the debts of her eldest sister, and constantly exerting her influence to obtain engagements and high salaries for her brother and sisters.

But though an excellent daughter and kind sister, she did not manifest her affection in so romantic a manner as the newspaper anecdotes would have it believed. A very affecting trait of sisterly solicitude, in which Rachel was made to play the part of the beneficent fairy in the story books, was published lately. The tale ran as follows:

Rachel and Rebecca were playing *Tisbe* and *Catarina* in "Angelo." Delighted with Rebecca's success, Rachel hired a handsome apartment, furnished it suitably, omitting nothing, from the house linen in the clothes-press, to the wine wood, and coals, with which the cellars were well stocked. When all was in readiness, one night after the play, she took her sister to see her new domain, saying, as she placed the key—not *Angelo's*—in *Catarina's* hand:

"My dear, you have played like an angel, and I have provided your reward; all this is yours."

This delightful little surprise, got up at a cost of 15,000fr., properly enhanced by the description of the joy of the younger sister, the affecting embrace, the emotion of friends witnessing the pathetic scene, and the excellence of the supper that was the finale—for even that had been provided by the provident donor—constituted a pretty little episode for the biography of Rachel, to which only one objection could be made—its lack of truth. Whatever might be the affection of the *tragedienne* for this sister, it never led her to such a demonstration. When Rebecca died she had not finished paying for the furniture which she had herself purchased for her apartment; she was, moreover, so much in debt that

the family made no claim to what she left lest they should have to pay the creditors, for whose benefit, therefore, everything was sold at auction.

All the Felixes have been accustomed to look to Rachel, and with good reason, as their mainstay and support. They repay and keep up the flow of generosity by a continual adoration of the idol that sometimes takes the most ludicrous forms. When she plays the mother and sisters go off into extasies of delight, clapping their hands, crying out, brava! bravissima! vociferating "Was ever the like seen! She is an angel! Adorable! divine!" &c., and ending the farce by throwing their ready-prepared bouquets on the stage. It requires the really extraordinary talent of Rachel to make managers tolerate these silly scenes. But Rachel has reigned supreme and despotic behind the curtain throughout her career. From the manager to the fireman and sceneshifter, all have been the cringing slaves of her will, dreading her frown, disputing her smiles, attentive to her slightest wish. At the Théâtre Français, king or emperor, even the government that supports it, none have the regal despotic power exercised there by Rachel. At the hour for the curtain to rise a respectful knock is heard at her door, followed by the words:



"Is madame quite ready? Will madame have the goodness to say when the signal shall be given." The answer is "*in ten, or five minutes—presently, now,*" &c., as she pleases; no one else is consulted, though all the other actors are bound to hold themselves in readiness at the hour. Her word was law. As to authors, we will not shame the world of *belles lettres* by mentioning the degree of base servility to which some of the illustrious of modern literature have unblushingly stooped to please this queen of the buskin. The acts of injustice done to other actors and actresses to make room for some very inferior talent, merely because its possessor bore the name of Felix, are recorded in the memory of many a poor sufferer. The advancement, the interest, of her own family were sought without regard to any considerations of equity or even gratitude. A flagrant instance of this occurred in the case of a very charming and deserving actress who personated with remarkable talent the *suivantes* of Molière. Mademoiselle Aveuel had consented to accompany Rachel on several of her foreign tours and had proved one of the most efficient members of her company. But absence, especially in the position of Mademoiselle Aveuel, is always dangerous. On her return she found herself without any

engagement. Mademoiselle Rachel immediately proffered her powerful influence and persuaded her to take no steps whatever as she took it upon herself to obtain the engagement at the Théâtre Français. She appointed an hour for Mademoiselle Aveuel to call upon the manager, saying she would have the whole thing settled by that time. Rachel kept her word; when Mademoiselle Aveuel, punctual to a minute, was wending her way to the manager's office, she met Sarah, who was leaving it, and who informed her with great glee, that she had just signed a very advantageous engagement that her sister had procured for her! Poor Mademoiselle Aveuel's heart sank at this communication, but she went in notwithstanding. The thing was too true! Mademoiselle Rachel had obtained the contract—for *her sister*. The victim had unfortunately no protection, no means of advancement.

A few words are due here to this charming actress, whose pure mind and strict principles contributed as much as her real talent to make her an honor to her profession. Aline Aveuel, who had entered the *conservatoire* about the same time as the *tragedienne*, made her *débüt* in 1839 and obtained great success in another line of the dramatic art. She was one of the best representatives of

Molière's *soubrettes* that had been seen for many years on the boards of the Théâtre Français. An indefatigable and conscientious student of the art she professed, she studied it *con amore*. Her firm, distinct and correct diction, the discrimination, good taste and expression of her pantomime, her bright, lively eyes, clear-toned, pleasant voice, fitted her admirably for the characters of the *Nicoles*, *Dorines* and *Marinettes*, those malapert and piquant match-makers and match-marrers, always helping Miss to frustrate papa's wise plans, and themselves the darlings of the laughter-loving public. Mademoiselle Aveuel subsequently quitted the Théâtre Français for reasons it is not our province to explain, and accompanied Mademoiselle Rachel in many of her professional excursions into England, Germany and Italy, taking an altogether different branch to that she had hitherto performed in, but one in which she proved herself possessed of no little ability. Her fine form and commanding figure, that were rather objections in the rôle of the dapper little *soubrette*, gave admirable relief to those of the proud Duchess de Bouillon in "Adrienne Lecouvreur" and of the Countess in "Lady Tartuffe."

The sterling qualities of Mademoiselle Aveuel, the unswerving rectitude of her conduct, had

opened before her the doors of some of the most aristocratic *salons* in Paris. But no success in private life could fill the void left in her heart by the loss of her professional career. She passionately loved her art, and the hopes so long deferred, the sickening disappointments she suffered in attempting to regain the place she had lost, contributed no little to hasten her death, which took place on the 26th of April, 1857.

Of all the sisters Rachel is considered to have been the only one capable of acting to the life that most difficult of all parts for the *parvenu*—the rôle of a gentlewoman. There was a dignity *de grande dame* about her, an ease and grace that procured her as much admiration as her talent. She entered the splendid aristocratic sphere into which her successful *débûts* had obtained admittance for her, without manifesting vanity or surprise; she seemed literally to the manner born, and accepted the favors of fortune as her due. There was a witchery about her that baffles description. Her very worst enemies, persons whom she has the most deeply wronged, acknowledge this fascination, and say it was impossible to come within the sphere of her influence without being won and completely subdued, if she chose to will it. In fact very little outward change had taken place in her since

she wore the little calico frock and trowsers at the *cours* of St. Aulaire, save that she had grown and was better dressed. The same calm, grave expression of face, and, it must be owned, something of the elf tricks and capricious temper remained. She has frequently been known to ask some of her young friends to dine or take tea with her; when the guest arrived the hostess was gone out. When reproached with her uncivil conduct she would make some plausible excuse, appoint another day, and renew her breach of word. Exceedingly courteous and kindly in manner, if anything belonging to her appeared to please her visitor, her first impulse was to offer it, to press it urgently on the acceptance of the person who admired it. If any hesitation was shown, she threatened to send it home to her friend. If the gift so persistingly offered was accepted, Rachel's Jew nature regained the ascendancy, she repented her prodigal generosity, the bauble she had bestowed became an indispensable necessity, just the thing she could not do without, and she had no rest till she had sent to request it to be returned!

At times she met with some resistance in this particular; obstinate people took her at her word and made her give what she had promised, or they

kept what she had given them. She had a way of saying, if any jewel she wore, or article of *vètu* in her rooms was admired: "I wish I could offer this to you, but it was a present from the Prince of — or the Duke of — and I cannot; you shall, however, have one just like it; I know where to get the mate and you will give me great pleasure by your acceptance. Oh, you shall, I insist upon it; you would not disoblige me, &c., &c., &c." This generally took place before a number of persons, and, as the promised present was usually of value, conveyed a high opinion of her generosity to those who did not know her, while it was very annoying to those who did and were considered the recipients of these generous gifts.

She one day said to a friend who was admiring a very beautifully-carved and embroidered chair:

"I am glad you like it—it is my work, and you shall have it to remember me."

"You give it to me, then?"

"Certainly, and I shall have it sent to your rooms?"

"I am exceedingly obliged to you and shall not trouble you to send it, but since you are so good as to give it me, shall take it now."

Rachel laughed; it was not an article he could

put in his pocket. But the friend knew her, and was resolved not to be fooled. He ran down stairs and was back again in a moment with a *commissionaire*, who bore off the prize.

To Leon de Beauvallet she gave a sabre of fine Turkish workmanship. "She cannot ask to have it back," said he, "for I have had a chain put to it."

The anecdotes told of her ostentatious generosity without expense to herself, are very numerous, but not all very reliable; for the truth of the following we do not pretend to vouch.

In 1853, Marguet, formerly a *Suisse* in the service of Louis Philippe, but who had subsequently been long attached to the Théâtre Français in the humble capacity of call-boy, retired. As he was universally liked, the *sociétaires* subscribed 20fr. each to buy him a snuff-box. Mademoiselle Rachel undertook the purchase and had the following inscription engraved on the lid: "Mademoiselle Rachel à Marguet."

There was a constant struggle in her—nature and early habits of parsimony being ever at variance with the wish to be thought generous, with the love of ostentation. These conflicting impulses frequently led to a betrayal of feelings

the very reverse of what she intended to exhibit. The story of the pine-apple will give some idea of this apparent inconsistency. Having occasion to give a dinner to a number of eminent personages, she ordered her desert at Chevet's. Among the expensive hot-house fruit selected was a pine-apple. At this epoch—1848—so few dinners were given, that it was scarcely worth while to import this tropical fruit ; it was consequently rare and dear. Rather than give the exorbitant price asked—70fr.—for the one she desired should form the pinnacle of her pyramidal desert, yet unwilling to give up the pleasure of seeing it admired there, she chose a compromise and hired it. Unfortunately, she had been accompanied to Chevet's by a mischievous friend, who, at desert, wickedly suggested to one of the noble guests the cutting of the ornamental summit. As the duke inserted the knife into the sacred fruit, the hostess, losing all command of her feelings, uttered a piercing shriek. “ Was the heart of Made-moiselle Rachel hidden in that pine ? ” queried a well-known poet.

Nothing could restore the good humour of the *tragédienne*. She had not hesitated to give a dinner that cost her 1200fr. She was wretched at having been disappointed in her scheme to save 70fr.



Rachel was herself so well aware of being a great promiser, and as backward to fulfil as she was ready to promise, that, alluding to this propensity, she said to a friend once: "If I were obliged to give all I have ever promised, the possession of the whole world would not furnish me wherewith." The reason of this seeming contradiction was, that the constant wish to please everyone about her, to purchase their good-will by every possible sacrifice, actuated her first impulse—she had no sooner obeyed it than the fear of having lessened her possessions took the alarm and undid what the love of admiration had done.

This incessant craving for admiration kept her continually on the alert. *Elle pose toujours* is said by all who know her—that is, she felt always before the foot-lights, and was as desirous of obtaining the praise of the porter at the gate as that of the lord of the chateau. She was one day with her sister Sarah at her house in the valley of Montmorenci while some repairs were being made. As they sat alone together Rachel remarked how inconvenient stiff skirts were.

"Why do you wear them when we are here alone?" said Sarah.

"Oh, dear!" cried the *tragédienne*, "I couldn't

think of being seen by the workmen so thin and scraggy as I look without a crinoline !”

In this strange being, in whom great, even sublime things, were mingled with the petty littlenesses, the trivialities, the meannesses inherent to the lower class of the race, there was one passion that predominated over all the rest, and to which her woman's vanity, her artist's pride gave way, to which her very genius was made the subservient tool ; that passion which was born with her—the *love of gold*. Beyond this there was nothing in life. An incident, related by herself, will give some idea of the extreme to which it was carried.

Shortly after she had attained her majority, she had gone to Marseilles, where, for one night's performance, she was to receive 3,000fr. On the day after the performance, the money was brought to her in a chest. At that time gold was not the common medium of circulation it has since become, and payments, even of large sums, were often made in silver. Rachel was recently emancipated from the parental trammels, she had never had in her own possession anything like this amount. At sight of this box, full of five-franc pieces, this quantity of money, all *her's*, her eyes dilated and fastened upon it with an intensity that

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was almost painful to behold; to use her own words, worthy of an actress accustomed to a tragic style; she felt *the ferocious joy of an animal that has the long wished-for prey within its clutches*. There was no childish exultation, no outward delight, none of the exultant pride of the girl who has by her own exertions earned a large sum, no feminine feelings of pleasant anticipation of the many pretty fancies this sum could gratify—no, it was a quiet, inward, savage enjoyment of the *money itself*, independent of all associations generally connected with it. She ordered the box to be placed before her by her bed-side, and plunging her hands into it, kept stirring the silver about.

“Never,” said she to the person to whom she related this, “never had I seen so many five-franc pieces together, and all belonging to me!”

She kept the box by her, and the feeling, sordid, rapacious, possessed her throughout the night.

The fascination exercised by gold on the human mind, according to the character, temper, &c., of the person on whom it acts, is extremely diversified in its effects; were these always candidly acknowledged, the insight thus obtained would afford matter for interesting study. An instance of this singular influence occurred within the

knowledge of the writer. A very young lady received a sum of 3,000 dollars shortly after her marriage. Though the daughter of persons in good circumstances, she had never had so large a sum at her own disposal. The sight of this number of gold pieces produced an effect similar to that she would have felt had she been drinking wine—a species of intoxication. When she retired to bed she spread the money on the sheets and slept upon it! Yet this person was the very reverse of avaricious. According to her own analysis of her feelings it was the consciousness of the power gold represented, that gave it so great a charm. The feeling was, however, as short-lived as it was sudden.

Less innocent effects of this fascination have brought its victims within the pale of a criminal court. Among these unfortunates was, of late years, a young man of respectable parentage who had always borne an excellent character for strict integrity. Having obtained a situation with a chemist, he was one day left alone before an open drawer containing a large sum of money. The temptation overpowered his natural honesty. Being subsequently asked by the magistrate how it happened that he, who had been so well brought up, whose principles of honesty had hitherto been

so firm, should have committed an act that seated him on the bench with hardened thieves, he replied that he was not in his senses, for the instant he fixed his eyes on the drawer *the fever of gold ascended to his brain!*

To gratify this insatiate desire to add continually to her store, Rachel is said to have tasked her inventive powers, and generally with the success that attended all her undertakings. The following anecdote was current among her acquaintances: On one occasion she announced to her numerous friends and admirers that she had a perfect passion for emeralds, and intended making a collection of those beautiful gems. For this purpose she had already procured a very fine one, which she complacently exhibited to one of the titled sons of fortune who followed in the train of the tragic muse, as the gift of a competitor in the race for her good graces. The appeal was understood and responded to with a contribution of course more valuable than the specimen exhibited, the last gift in turn doing duty as a decoy to draw others, until the collection was large as it was rich and rare—no one being willing to be outdone by his predecessor. This manœuvre, varied according to the victim played upon, brought into the lady's jewel casket some thirty or forty of the

finest emeralds in Paris, each gem set with more or less magnificence, and some surrounded with brilliants.

The following year the whim was for rubies, and finally the lady raised a sapphire tax. When her ingenuity or the generosity of her contributors was exhausted, a jeweller was sent for, to whom the valued and valuable souvenirs were sold for the price that could be obtained—the money was put where it brought in better interest than in its former more brilliant but less profitable shape.

The story of the guitar has been told in a variety of ways: the following is reported to be the most authentic version:

Every one has heard of the grand vizier who had once been a shepherd boy, and who, having attained to the summit of power, desirous of being kept in remembrance of his early poverty, had hung up in a room of his sumptuous palace the humble garb, the shepherd's crook, of his boyhood. A report was long afloat that, following this excellent example, Mademoiselle Rachel had hung on her gilded walls the time-worn guitar of the barefooted street minstrel. The groundwork of this affecting anecdote is quite true—there *is* or *was* a *guitar*, and that guitar occupied a con-

spicuous and honorable place among the splendid ornaments of Mademoiselle Rachel's boudoir. The celebrated artiste had noticed at the house of a friend a guitar of most respectable antiquity, the original color of which had long ago disappeared under the thick black crust with which Time had coated it.

"Are you much attached to that piece of lumber?" quoth Rachel to Madame S., the owner—"would you mind giving it to me?"

"Oh! no, indeed," was the reply, "I shall be glad to get rid of it."

The maid was sent off with the guitar to Rachel's lodgings.

A few days after it was the turn of an intimate male friend to notice the instrument, but this time it hung, enveloped in a beautiful silk net, through the bright meshes of which its black back was plainly visible, on the gilded wall of an elegant boudoir.

"What in the world have you there?" quoth the visitor.

"That," said Rachel, assuming a sentimental attitude, "that is the humble guitar, the faithful companion with which, in the days of my childhood, I earned the scanty pittance bestowed on the poor little street-singer."

"Good heavens! can it be possible! How very interesting! Oh, I beg, I entreat you to let me become the fortunate possessor of that inestimable treasure! To me, to the world, to history, a precious memento—to future generations a priceless legacy!" exclaimed Mr. — in the glow of his enthusiasm.

"Oh, I can never, *never* consent to part with it."

"I must have it, at any cost; do not deny me this gift, to be held as a sacred relic; and permit me to offer you, as a poor exchange, the set of diamonds and rubies you appeared to admire some days ago at the jeweller's."

"Ah, well!" quoth the tragic muse, heaving a deep sigh, "since you will have it, I cannot refuse you."

The *historical* instrument obtained so cheaply, at a cost of some 50,000frs. was triumphantly installed in the aristocratic apartment of its new owner, who exhibited it to every caller, narrating its pathetic origin with the emphatic delivery of a showman at a fair. Unfortunately the original possessor happened to have occasion to call on the noble count, and, recognizing the present she had made to Rachel, uttered an exclamation of surprise. An explanation, given without malice



prepenſe, for Madame S., quite ignorant of the miſchief ſhe was doing, deſtroyed the romance attached to the relic ſo dearly purchaſed. Rachel repented too late not having warned her unconſcious accomplice. As for the count he could not forgive himſelf for having been ſo readily the dupe of his own unſuſpecting enthuſiaſm.

Some one who heard of this ſucceſſful little ſpeculation and ſomewhat doubted its truth, mentioned the report to Mademoiſelle Rachel, thinking to hear her give it an indignant denial. But the heroine only laughed, exclaiming: “Poor — how furious he was!”

Out of the circle of her own family Rachel was accuſed of having no conſideration for any intereſt but her own. With her there was no artistic fraternity; ſhe would crush every appearance of talent that entered her ſphere, and has committed, or cauſed to be committed, innumerable acts of injuſtice in order to clear her path of any one likely to obtain the ſlighteſt ſhare of the notice ſhe wiſhed entirely to monopolize. It cannot be wondered that ſuch conduct ſhould have eſtranged the affections of her comrades. Some one aſking Mademoiſelle Judith why ſhe was ſo ſevere in her remarks on one who, after all, was a co-religioniſt of hers. “True,” replied the

witty actress, "but with a difference—I am a Jewess, but Rachel, Rachel is a Jew!"

She has too often appeared to sacrifice the dignity of art, and made her talent a mere article of barter and sale, to be bargained for shamelessly and sold to the highest bidder. Her continual discussions and lawsuits with the management of the Théâtre Français have fully shown that she considered the theatre as her counter, her shop, where she put into practice all the tricky manœuvres of her parents' first trade to get the better of those she made contracts with. Here she gave the rein to a temper, harsh, cold, despotic, sulky or stormy, as the occasion might call it forth, but never kind or agreeable in business. With the management she has constantly been at variance, having recourse to every pretext to elude fulfilling her engagements when she found it to her advantage.

With the public, with the admirers who thronged her box between the acts—for Rachel seldom honored the green-room with her presence—she was all smiles and winning manners. In society, it has already been said, she possessed such perfect tact, so great a delicacy of intuition, so natural an appreciation of that which is refined and elegant, that from the very hour of her

admission into it, she moved there with graceful ease, and fell instantly into its habits, never betraying by any solecism that she pertained to a different sphere.

She was, in truth, an astonishing compound of good qualities and of imperfections, of greatness and of littleness, of the sublime and the low. Her temper offers the same strange mixture of wisdom and folly, boldness and timidity, modesty and passion it did in early youth; in some points more developed, in others more subdued by years and circumstances, but in essence, still the same fantastic, elf-like nature.

It is said that the cunning, the deceitful, tricky, doubling arts of the vendors of "ol' clo'," chaffering with menials for cast-off garments, were at times resorted to by the wealthy queen of tragedy to further her interests, and that the lips that have given such eloquent utterance to the great classic poets, and distilled hyblean sweets to sovereigns, lords, and ladies entranced by her accents, were equally ready to drive unconscionable bargains.

The passion for locomotion which, united to the love of gain, led her to be constantly on the wing from Paris to the provinces, from France to Russia, to Germany, Italy, England, and finally

to the United States, travelling incessantly during two-thirds, and even three-fourths, of each year, may perhaps have been owing to the nomade life of the mother. Those who seek in the propensities and habits of the parent the germ of the child's inclination—in accordance with the system of pre-existent education—may here find an explanation of Rachel's roving habits. The mother's avocation had influenced the temper and tastes of her unborn babe. The *tragédienne* hawked about her talent as the parent had her less valuable merchandise. But in this particular, Rachel did not differ much from other artists, philharmonic as well as dramatic.

Yet, with all her faults, it will be long perhaps before Nature will gift another of her children as richly as she has Rachel, and unite in one being, her genius, her intuitive conception of the sublime and the beautiful, her extraordinary power of expressing what she so perfectly conceives, her grand pagan qualities, her Greek, statue-like figure, her majesty of brow and attitude, her quiet dignity of manner. If we lose her we may well say: *there is a great spirit gone.*

The passion apparently most deeply rooted in Rachel's nature was, next to the ruling one of

gold, the love of dominion, the thirst of power over the hearts of others, the acquisition of whatsoever belonged to another ; whether the object was the heart of a man or the most trifling bauble, it mattered not so long as it was the property of another ; it was ardently coveted, and every artifice, every temptation, every seduction—and what daughter of Eve could boast of such an arsenal of irresistible weapons as that which Rachel possessed—was resorted to in order to obtain it. The instant it was hers the longed for-object lost all attraction, it was utterly despised ; unless, indeed, it possessed a metallic value, every other charm was annihilated by possession. The human victims that have been sacrificed to bring to her feet the homage tributed to another have been so numerous that she herself would have been puzzled to number them. Were hearts made of the brittle texture they are supposed to be by mad poets and boarding-school misses, the fragments of those broken by Rachel would have cumbered her path. Fortunately those trophies are of tougher materials, and, if ever flawed, are easily mended and made as good as ever. As for her own, there was no danger—love, affection, passion, sentiment, feeling never determined her choice. The advantages to be derived from the position, station, rank, or wealth of a

friend, or the triumph of seducing the allegiance tendered at some other shrine, were ever the guiding motives of her selection, and where she willed she never failed.

It has been said that Rachel was not beautiful; perhaps she was not to the eye that sees beauty but in certain conventional forms, in a certain color; but while none can pronounce her to have been plain, she possessed that higher degree of beauty imparted by the radiant light of genius illuminating the countenance. For such as delight in detailed accounts of each feature we give them here, premising that descriptions never furnish an adequate idea of the effect of the whole upon the beholder.

The head was perfectly shaped, rather small, rather broad, not high, and covered with dark chesnut hair, neither thick nor thin, but beautifully fine, soft and silky. The brow, endowed with such extraordinary power of expression, was prominent and wide, but low; her eyebrows were exquisitely drawn; the eyes, the same color as the hair, were neither large nor small, but so deep set that they had the appearance of being intensely black; they were fringed with very long silky lashes. The mouth, neither large nor small, was filled with teeth all perfect and beautifully white

—the under-lip was long and thick, not suggestive of sulks, but of storms, and, though so defective in point of beauty, extremely expressive. The nose was beautiful, the curve indicating the race very slightly inclining the tip; but it was perfect in its proportions, with thin, transparent, veiny nostrils. The chin was small and pretty. The delicate little ear was compared by a soft-hearted *bon vivant* to an Ostend oyster, and lay close to the head. From the tip of the ear to the chin the face was a long oval. The skin was fair and extremely delicate. In size Rachel was rather above the middle height; her figure had the liteness, the grace, the flexibility of a reed, and, in repose, gave the impression of a very delicate constitution, but when she was acting an energetic part the long slight arms seemed to change to steel, so powerful was the character of inflexibility they presented. The hands, which were rather pretty, were objects of continual care and solicitude with Mademoiselle Rachel; her feet might have served as models to a modern Praxiteles. The limbs were so well fastened on, the shoulders so graceful, that the thinness of the figure was hardly noticed. The peculiar shape of the chest, however, almost amounted to a deformity; the breast-bone was like a fowl's, bony, projecting sharply, ungraceful

to the eye. The defect was not at all perceptible either in theatrical costume or ordinary dress; the folds of the peplum and tunic in the first quite concealed it, and the skill of the dressmaker in the latter was no less successful.

The above attempt to describe features whose peculiar merit was in their great power of expression, in their wonderful delineations of the passions, must prove very unsatisfactory. The only description that can convey any idea of the inimitable *jeu de physionomie* of that eloquent face is the exhortation of Henry V. to his soldiers — an exhortation she had never read, but which nature had taught her to obey to the letter :

“ Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
Disguise fair nature with hard favour'd rage ;  
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect ;  
Let it pry through the portage of the head  
Like the brass cannon ; let the brow o'erwhelm it  
As fearfully as doth a galled rock  
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostrils wide ;  
Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit  
To his full height.”

All this the features of Mademoiselle Rachel were eminently fitted to convey. She had also, with that intuitive knowledge that sometimes takes the place of study, followed the excellent advice of



*Hamlet* to the players, and marred with rant and scream none of the effects produced by her countenance. Few actors have like her made silence often more eloquent than words. Few have so well understood that excessive grief is never expressed by violent action; that deep reflection precludes it altogether; that indignation, contempt, pride, menace, concentrated rage, are shown in the countenance rather than in the motions. A look contains more terror than the frantic stride; the often ludicrous gestures that "please the vulgar, make the critic laugh." The ancients who acted under a mask, could have no idea of the advantages derived from the system adopted by the moderns.

## CHAPTER XII.

1843.

*The Drama Behind the Mask.*

It is not unfrequently the case that reality, more poignant than the most highly-wrought fiction, is concealed beneath the tragic mask. The stage is then the arena of gladiators who peril far more than the combatants in the Roman circus, for the latter perilled life only—the modern gladiator stakes the Divine ray, the God-given torch—his reason. At times the unconscious judges who have come to while away an hour, to see how far and how well humanity can be mimicked in its wildest and most terrific moods, how nicely the unnatural may be made to look natural, how closely fiction can be made to resemble truth, at times these indifferent spectators, eager only to get the worth of their money, and ready to cavil on a word

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and harp on a gesture, little deem that before their eyes another and a far more fatal drama is being performed. But there are other instances when the secret has ceased to be one, when the knowledge of the terrific stake to be played has been made an incentive to increase the interest, when the life, the death, or madness of a fellow-creature his fearful struggle, his last agony, his despairing effort to rekindle the expiring ray, are used as attractive items in the playbill, when the victim himself makes a speculation of his tortures, sanctions this fearful exposure of the most pitiful bereavement that can afflict a God-forsaken creature, and counts in anticipation the gains.

Ay; all are bidden to the harrowing *fête*, all respond eagerly to the summons, for the spectacle is to be no common one. A remnant of humanity, wearing still the outer semblance of a man, while all within is vacancy; a being all once knew so well, who knows himself no longer; whose friends, whose children, whose very name are effaced from the tablet of his blurred and blotted memory! Yet this name he has forgotten was once, to thousands of his admirers, suggestive of no sadness. At its mention the merry laugh and droll jest again resounded in the ear, melancholy took flight, wit and humour reigned omnipotent.

This shattered idol, this defaced relic of the past, has intervals when light pierces the darkness, when dethroned reason for a brief space resumes her sway, when he fathoms the abyss into which he has fallen, when he is conscious of what is, remembers what was, and, worst of all, knows what must be again—in a day—in an hour—anon—even perhaps, while he thinks of it! And this unfortunate has bethought himself that another such gleam of intelligence may be taken advantage of to secure to the rayless night of his old age physical comforts that money alone can procure. He has but an hour, an uncertain, fleeting hour—he will sell it to the world for bread! Yesterday he was nameless, to-morrow he will again be so, but to-night he will give the public the personification of the wittiest, most sarcastic, most brilliant and fascinating of his characters. Ay, he is right, too, in his anticipation of pecuniary success! The alms the cold charity of the world have grudged his misfortune, will be willingly paid as the reward of this gratification of morbid curiosity.

In the early part of January, Mademoiselle Rachel acted, for the benefit of Monrose, one of the best *Figaros* the boards had ever known. Poor Monrose had been indebted to his success in Beaumarchais' play to a constant study of it

that had had the most fatal result — insanity! He did not *play* the part, he had identified himself with it, on the stage and off of it; at table, waking, and sleeping, he was in his *rôle*. This constant absorption of the author's creation produced a strange phenomenon; the actor could no longer lay down the fictitious part, and be himself; the character, like the robe of the *centaur*, clung to him and would not be torn away. He had forgotten his name, but he immediately answered to that of *Figaro*. In conversation he was absent and appeared neither to hear nor understand, but a quotation from the “*Barbier*” brought forth a prompt, an animated answer, the droll gesture, the contagious laugh. He had forgotten his own existence, he had not forgotten a line of the play!

We have said that the unfortunate actor had determined, in a lucid interval, to take advantage of the next one to come again before the public, and endeavour to earn during that respite where-with to supply himself with the comforts his helpless condition required. The house was crowded; the anxiety of spectators and actors may be readily conceived; the sight was terrible, the trial exciting in the highest degree. All, conscious of the truth, dreaded at each word, at each gesture

a return of the fatal malady—nay, doubted whether it had not returned and was not lurking beneath the apparent calm. The *Rosine* and the *Almavives* of the evening were under the influence of a terror they could scarcely disguise. The object of all this alarm seemed to seek, by his off-hand, easy grace, his brilliant sallies and his smiling looks, to re-assure them. There are in the rôle of *Figaro* passages but too allusive to his unhappy state, and every heart beat with terror as the doomed man uttered the three words at the conclusion of the 3rd act. "*Il est fou! Il est fou! Il est fou!*" And here and here only did Monrose himself seem to allow that he was aware of the truth—he uttered the sentence each time with increased vehemence and with an expression of the most poignant grief. Even Mademoiselle Rachel, who that evening played her best character, one with which she was most familiar, actually lost her memory twice during the performance.

When Monrose entered, a thunder of applause welcomed him, and it would have been renewed much oftener had not the fear of exciting him too much counselled calmer tokens of approbation. He surpassed his former self; it seemed impossible that the fine intellect, so quick at comprehend-

ing all the wit of the author, so readily interpreting it, should be doomed to utter darkness again—and, most terrible of all, that gay, laughing, charming spirit, knew his doom! The general impression, notwithstanding the wit and humour of the play, could not but be sad; the more gay and merry seemed the actor, the greater was the regret at losing him again. The farewell of the public produced a sum of 18,000frs. The intelligent physician of the asylum, Doctor Blanche, remained behind the scenes, comforting and encouraging him between the acts, but himself paler and far more anxious than the brilliant *Figaro*.

Another sad instance of the faculty of assimilation, carried so far that the unfortunate mimic has lost his own being, and adopted that of his model, occurred some years previous to the case of Monrose. Insanity was the stage theme then in vogue, as blindness has been the recent one—humanity, not content with the painful realities that afflict it, takes a strange delight in reproducing their semblance.

The actress who was to play the part of the stricken heroine on the boards of one of the second class theatres of the Boulevards, was a young, delicate, and pretty girl, gifted with an organization far too sensitive and nervous to bear

with impunity the terrible working up necessary for the personification of the *rôle*. Called upon to simulate madness, that is the annihilation of the noblest of God's gifts, to "disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage," distort her features, and go through all the fearful mimicry of that most fearful of all diseases, she studied the part conscientiously, and frequently repaired to an insane hospital, in order to study in all its phases, and reproduce with scrupulous fidelity unnatural nature. She succeeded but too well; she learned to imitate the vacant stare, the horrid grin, the hollow laugh, the broken voice, and, step by step, acquired an appalling perfection. Fearing to lose the faculty thus painfully acquired, she kept on her terrific mask, even when off the stage, for hours together. One evening, between the acts, she carried the mockery so far as to endeavor to *persuade herself for a short time* that she was one of the wretched creatures she had so often watched striding up and down in the paved court of the Salpêtrière, insane among the insane, mad among the mad!—and she succeeded—succeeded beyond her wishes—succeeded *for ever*! She realised her audacious mockery—the despair of the heart ascended to the reeling, overturned brain—she was seized with a vertigo; before her rose the



panorama of the anticipated tomb of reason; she heard the gnashing of teeth, the heart-rending shriek, the distracting yell; she saw herself crouching among the grinning skeletons, she looked in the glass and behold! her eye shot forth a strange light—she tried to sing, her voice was choked; to weep, and two drops fell like molten lead on her sunken cheek; to pray, and blasphemous curses issued from her lurid lips; to clasp her hands, and the nails closed like talons into the quivering flesh; to dress herself, every tasteful instinct was gone, and in its place perverted fancies alone remained! She had accomplished her object; she had perfected her part; she had found the fearful ideal so long sought! At this awful moment the bell rings, and, true to long-followed habit, she rushed on the stage. Strange to say, the public, beholding the terribly truthful apparition, this haggard, soiled, ragged wretch, with dishevelled straw-wreathed hair and foaming mouth, the public hissed, the public exclaimed that the girl was *drunk*! that *it* was insulted! that *she did not know her part*! So much for the judgment of the public! Alas, she was mad! hopelessly, incurably insane, and those who yet may wish to attain perfection in the part can study it at their leisure in the person of its

victim, who, clothed in the ignominious straight jacket at the Salpêtrière, remains a lesson to those who daringly outrage God in his noblest work, and throw down the gauntlet to the weak brain they should seek to strengthen.

## CHAPTER XIII.

1843.

*Phèdre* ; a First Attempt—"Judith"—An Unexpected *Débütante*—Southern Enthusiasm—A Deed of Charity—*Débûts* of Raphael and Rebecca Felix in the "*Cid*."

MADemoiselle RACHEL began this year with the tragedy of "*Phèdre*." The day chosen—the 21st of January—caused no little surprise in the circles of the aristocratic Faubourg St. Germain, that had given so kind a reception to the young *tragédienne*. This little world, that held itself aloof and scorned to mix with the plebeian court of 1830, that dwelt in the heart of the busy capital as isolated as though nothing existed beyond its own sphere, that adhered with noble tenacity to the religious faith, to the political creed of forefathers who had sealed them with their blood on the scaffold—the Faubourg St. Germain—had greeted with enthusiasm the new Melpomène. With the legitimists she was the representative of

the classic—to them the monarchial—theatre. She was the principal example of a reaction that was to cast the dramatic school of the revolution into the shade. She was the interpreter of art in all its purity; and, as such, even rigid piety felt justified in vouchsafing encouragement and support to the Jewish actress. The exclusiveness of the sphere made her admission there the more flattering, while the assiduity with which her noble friends testified their approbation by appearing at every performance was of no little value in another sense.

To these faithful ones who held sacred the terrible *souvenirs* of the past, the choice of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Louis XVI. for her *débüt* in “*Phèdre*” was almost sacrilegious. At any rate, it denoted little respect for feeling she was bound to honor, if not to share. It was a rupture of the tacit contract that she had virtually accepted, and those who would have rejoiced in encouraging her in this new trial abstained from giving it the sanction of their presence.

Two months had scarcely elapsed since the faithless one had recited in the Convent of the Abbaye aux Bois that very *Phèdre* in the presence of the illustrious author of the “*Génie du*

Christianisme." She had received her first ideas of this *rôle* from the lips of that great apostle of legitimacy. She had had the inestimable privilege of hearing it discussed in the presence of him who had written so eloquent, though so erroneous, an analysis of the Greek queen's character. She had probably adopted the opinions echoed by his *entourage* and seen in *Phèdre* "a mixture of spirit and matter, of despair and amorous frenzy that is beyond all expression. The woman who could be resigned to an eternity of suffering had she enjoyed one moment of happiness; that woman belongs not to the characters of antiquity. She is the last, the reprobate Christian \* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \* her words are those of the damned."

The boldness of Mademoiselle Maxine in undertaking *Phèdre* the preceding year probably proved an incentive to Mademoiselle Rachel to try her far greater powers in this difficult *rôle*, the most difficult indeed of all the classic *repertoire*, the one that stamps the seal of genius on the actress, or reveals that, what was hitherto taken for genius was only talent. Here too the actress had to contend against the impression Mademoiselle Duchesnois had made in the part, an impression that

survived in the memory of many present. Mademoiselle Duchesnois was, *certes*, very inferior in some points to her young successor, but she possessed qualities most indispensable to tragedy of which Rachel was entirely destitute; she had from nature the faculty of expressing tenderness in its most moving form, depth of feeling in its most sympathetic, heart-stirring, passionate moods. *Phèdre*, the rôle of her *débüt*, had remained her favorite one throughout her long career, and she had never acted it without drawing tears from every spectator. Ten years had scarcely elapsed since her death, and that admirable, tear-pregnant voice still echoed in the hearts of many.

Mademoiselle Rachel knew well that she had to contend with these *souvenirs*—she knew too that she herself had been always reproached with a lack of tenderness, and she had resolved at any cost, even at the sacrifice of her finest natural qualities, to acquire those she had not. She forgot that she was not yet suited by time for the part of the daughter of *Pasiphæ*, and that the wife of *Theseus* is a woman of twenty-eight or thirty years of age. This attempt at forcing nature precluded all inspiration, and necessarily entailed constraint, fatigue, and a want of confidence in her own powers that re-acted painfully on the audience.

It was not until several years later that Rachel really displayed her splendid powers to full advantage in this *rôle*. On the present occasion expectation was disappointed. She played still in her own grand authoritative style, but effect was produced by the nerves, not the heart. Critics loudly complained that in *Phèdre* she was still *Hermione* and that consequently in the five acts of the former, she found but two—the third and fourth—into which she introduced the inflections, the gestures, the disdain, rage, and scorn of her favorite character—that, in fact, in lieu of studying a new part, she had merely effected a transposition of the old. To judge of Rachel in this character, on this, her first attempt, would be unjust—Rachel was not *Phèdre* until eleven years later.

On the 24th of April the long-expressed wishes of the public were gratified, and Mademoiselle Rachel appeared in a *rôle* of her own creation, in a character written expressly for her, as a heroine of her own race and her own religion.

Circumstances that to many would appear the most favorable for the actress, turned out to be the most disadvantageous that could possibly have occurred. The tragedy of “Judith” was the work of a woman, handsome, brilliant and fashion-

able, the cynosure of a circle composed of men of the highest order of intellect and of sparkling wit, the pet of the world of letters and of the world of fashion, herself occupying a high place in either sphere, the talented child of a talented mother, the wife of one of the omnipotent arbiters of merit and the head of one of the chief organs of the press. The result may be imagined;—if the tragedy was fine it of course would be well supported—if poor, it would be supported *quand même* and the failure laid to the interpreter.

The theme was ill chosen ; it had already been tried by others without success, but it was hoped that the talent of the authoress, supported by that of the actress, would make it this time acceptable. It must be confessed that it was scarcely possible to make a worse selection as to subject than this page cut from the bible and dramatized. *Judith* could never be a popular heroine in France—this widow, introducing herself into the bed of a besotted barbarian and chopping off his head with a great Damascus sabre, inspires more disgust than admiration. There is something indescribably repulsive in the apparent pandering to the loathsome desires of an enemy in order to butcher him in cold blood ; not all the splendour of imagery, not



all the power of language, the smoothness of verse or music of rhythm could ever render the unfeminine perpetrator interesting. The heroine was said to be the counterpart of Charlotte Corday; no comparison can be established between the enthusiastic, the fanatic, but withal eminently modest, gentle and pure French heroine, whose brow blushed even after death, and the bold virago who made lust the minister of vengeance.

This, one of the most atrocious stories contained in the Old Testament, was the last that a fair authoress should have thought of picturing. She should have reflected that actions suited perhaps to those remote times were not presentable on the stage of the 19th century. This scene of debauchery and murder, in which wine and blood are disgustingly mingled and poured forth together, in which treachery and lust are the actors, where descriptions of sacked cities, carnage, pillage and revolts are the interludes, where there is not one glorious deed, one magnanimous action, one noble or interesting personage, where all is abhorrent to nature—this surely was no subject for the pen of a true woman like Madame de Girardin. It might perhaps have suited a member of the *Womans' Rights' Convention*, who, possessing none of the

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charms peculiar to her own sex, attempts to supply the deficiency by an affectation of masculine qualities. In France no sympathy is felt for these unsexed creatures. A French audience could not applaud such a drama, this unjustifiable crime, this kiss on the edge of a sword, this deadly hyena's embrace; faugh! the thing might inspire repulsion and horror, but the tragic elements of pity, terror, rage, fear, love, are all wanting.

There remains to examine by what miracles of poesy, by what efforts of genius it was sought to render this atrocious compound acceptable.

The first act opens well and gives some hope of excellence—the second and third are below mediocrity. The plot and the characters denote a false conception, a lack of invention. The triple love of *Holopherne*, of *Phédme* and of *Judith*, which the author evidently thought would be very effective, is not only cold and uninteresting, but it borders on the ludicrous. The scene where *Judith* bids the princes “down on their knees,” in which the repetition of *à genoux!* was intended to be sublime, is laughable in the extreme. All the third act, with the intrigue of the pavilion between the two tents, proves a barren imagi-

nation. The invocation of *Judith* before the murder of *Holopherne* intended to be a sort of imprecation à la *Camille* is sheer nonsense. At the same time the style, with the exception of a few verses, is clear and elegant throughout the whole play.

It was impossible that an actress, however great her ability, could do anything with such a part—a character that is inspired by no strong passion, a widow without real grief, a mistress without real love, a fanatic without inspiration. No one is tempted to repeat the exclamation of *Racine* in allusion to the *Judith* of Royer: “I weep for that poor *Holopherne*, so traitorously done to death by *Judith*.” None of the *dramatis personæ* excite compassion in Madame de Girardin’s tragedy—if anyone deserved pity it was the actress condemned to bear so heavy a burthen.

And this was the play that Rachel was called to present to the public! This insignificant characterless heroine was to be her first creation! To the deficiencies of the tragedy were added other circumstances that were considered harbingers of success, but which proved elements of failure. The play was, as is frequently the case in France, first submitted to the criticism of what is called a “private reading.” A circle composed of men bearing the highest names in France for rank and

intellect—such a circle as will never again perhaps be formed, the less so that the loved and lovely point of attraction is no more—assembled in the elegant *salon* of the authoress. In the middle of this assemblage of critics, all devoted friends and enthusiastic admirers, the charming hostess, with large blue eye gleaming with poetic fire, light waving ringlets and heaving chest, in clear, musical, eloquent tones, pregnant with faith in her work, read very tolerable verses to ears predisposed to approve. It cannot be wondered at that these friends, though bearing the names of Victor Hugo, de Lamartine, de Balzac, &c., should have proved but prejudiced judges and should have lacked the prudence, the foresight and severity that dispassionate critics and an unbiassed public would bring to the task! They forgot that *Judith* would not always be presented to an audience of friends by an authoress surrounded by all the prestige of love and admiration, reciting with enthusiastic conviction her own verses, and who, carried away by her own feelings, weeps herself and draws forth responsive tears from her audience. The consequence was that when these same approving friends found the real public cold, unmoved and unadmiring, rather than acknowledge their error, rather than retract the mistaken praise so prodigally ~~was~~

injudiciously bestowed, they found it more convenient to shift the blame on to the shoulders of Rachel. That the actress in this ill-chosen part which she was called upon to create was below her own level, that she played coldly, without soul, heart, understanding, conviction or feeling, was true, but she had sufficient excuse for this—it may be added that she was yet too young, too ignorant and inexperienced to “create” a character so unnatural; she could have recourse to no antecedents, no traditions, she was deprived of that to which she was accustomed to look for support, that without which she really could not act—the rapturous enthusiasm, the expectant admiration of the crowd. It is scarcely necessary to add that the result was the downright and complete failure of the play and the actress.

However unfortunate in the chief points of the tragedy, Mademoiselle Rachel, in outward appearance, was a splendid *Judith*. The good taste that had presided in the selection of her costumes was worthy of all praise. The mourning dress in the first act was chaste and severe. The costume of the other acts was resplendent. The dress, of a pale rose color, embroidered with golden stars; the purple mantle, the oriental scarf, covered with exquisite embroidery; the scriptural jewels that

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adorned her neck, arms, hair, and ears, formed a gorgeous *ensemble* that did credit to the taste and erudition of M. Chasseriau, the artist who designed the costumes.

During the performance of "Judith," one of those incidents that, though in themselves perfectly insignificant, often upset the best-calculated plans, occurred. During the first act, when the hapless Hebrews are lamenting their fate and imploring the assistance of Heaven, at the most pathetic moment, a small grey cat, wearing the necklace of bits of cork indicating her recent maternity, crossed the whole length of the stage, gazing with astonished eyes at the *dramatis personæ* there assembled. This trifling incident called forth roars of laughter from the spectators; cries of *puss, puss*, imitations of catterwauling, and comic remarks were heard from the pit, and even the wretched Hebrews, forgetting the terrible thirst they suffered and the woes that afflicted Bethulia, had the utmost difficulty to refrain from joining in the contagious merriment. The effect on the play was very unfortunate. It became impossible to obtain a quarter of an hour's serious attention from the audience, notwithstanding the presence of Rachel—*Judith*; her influence was great indeed, but with a Parisian

public, always inclined to see the ridiculous side of everything, it was quite counterbalanced by that of puss with her cork collar.

Mademoiselle Rachel, during the *congé* of this year, visited the south of France. Her reception was extremely flattering, especially at Marseilles, where it had even been arranged that a cavalcade of young men from the city should go some distance to meet and bring her into it in triumphant procession. Unfortunately for the plans of these enthusiastic squires, the lady they intended to honor entered the city before the hour she was expected. The musicians of the Grand Théâtre were more fortunate in the accomplishment of their intentions; they executed their projected serenade under her windows, much to her and their own satisfaction.

The provincial press had enough to do to record the triumphant progress of Mademoiselle Rachel. The receipts of the Marseilles theatre amounted to the hitherto unprecedented sum of 8,000fr. The highest sum ever drawn there by the presence of Talma had never exceeded 5,500fr. At the close of every performance an immense crowd accompanied her with noisy and enthusiastic applause to her hotel. At the close of the second performance of "Andromaque" she had nearly

been the victim of the admiration of the hot-headed southerners. The wish to see her caused such a pressure of the crowd that she barely escaped being crushed; the interposition of a number of robust artisans enabled her to take refuge in a shop, whence she at last succeeded in reaching her hotel by the assistance of a commissary of police and a detachment of soldiers.

Every movement, almost every look of the *tragédienne* was trumpeted with all the amplifications that exaggerated praise could imagine. One little anecdote is, however, worthy of note, whatever may have been the motives that influenced the action. While Mademoiselle Rachel was at Lyons she was told of a Jewish family that was reduced to the lowest stage of want. Having ascertained all necessary details of the case, Mademoiselle Rachel repaired on the following day to the sixth floor of a house in one of the poorest quarters of the town. Here she found a workman, his wife, and six children, without bread, clothes, or shoes. The gift of 300fr. which the visitor had brought for their relief, called forth a torrent of blessings and fervent thanks. Not content with this munificent donation, Mademoiselle Rachel stopped at a shoemaker's on her



way home, and ordered eight pairs of shoes for the poor people she had just left.

The presence of Mademoiselle Rachel at Lyons attracted numerous visitors from the adjacent towns. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the days on which she performed, the public edifices were thronged with strangers whiling away the time until the hour when the doors of the theatre opened.

Rachel gave twelve performances in Lyons, and left that city on the 12th of August for Switzerland, where she was to remain some time in order to rest from the fatigue consequent on her continued exertions. On the first of September she re-appeared on the boards of the Théâtre Français.

In this month two other members of the Felix family made their *débüt* on the stage of the Odéon. Raphaél, then seventeen years of age, and Rebecca, fifteen. The play was the "Cid," and whatever amount of intelligence, cultivated and developed by art, the precocious hero and heroine might possess, the effect could not but be ludicrous—Lilliputians interpreting the actions and feelings of Titans—full-grown actors seen through the small end of a *lorgnette*, were the ideas they suggested in the beholder. There was no lack of talent in the young *débutantes*, especially in Rebecca,

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though it lacked maturity ; but both were evidently copies of their successful sister. Neither they nor any other member of the family ever attained, however, to her height.

## CHAPTER XIV.

1844.

"Bérénice"—"Don Sanche d'Aragon"—"Catherine II."

IN January of 1844 the Théâtre Français revived the "Bérénice" of Racine. This play was written in 1670, when the power and glory of Louis XIV. had reached the climax, when all things had reference to the idol of the day, he who was the Alpha and Omega, whose power and whose amours afforded themes to the greatest poets, men to whom his smile was the highest reward, his frown the severest punishment. The episode of Titus and Bérénice in Roman history was suggested to Racine and Corneille by Henrietta of England: she who could so well sympathise with sorrows her own heart had experienced; she who could well appreciate the victory achieved by duty over love, for she also

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had been victorious in as hard a struggle. To the pure, chaste, and sincere love of Henrietta for the King, to the chivalrous and passionate devotion with which that love was repaid, to this mutual affection courageously resisted until esteem, admiration and respect alone survived, we are indebted for this splendid elegaic poem, a model of elegant diction, of pure style, of exquisite poetry.

To the court of Louis XIV. that saw in every line an allusion, in every character recognised a portrait, "*Bérénice*" was full of interest. But this picture of refined and pure love, which excited the sympathy and respect, which called forth the tears of the brilliant lords and graceful dames of Versailles, could have no interest for an audience of the nineteenth century, accustomed to the sanguinary horrors of the modern dramatic school, in which suicide, fratricide, bastardy, arson, are the themes; in which crazed imagination, invoking all the evil passions, seeks its heroes and heroines beyond the limits of Nature, in the realms of the Furies, or degrading the noble muse, drags her through the purlieus of crime to seek her subjects among the denizens of the bagnios and galleys. Tame and insipid must appear the chaste *Bérénice*, the noble *Titus*, to

ears satiated with modern horrors. Neither the queen nor her imperial lover lose life or reason. They do not threaten to make the world rock, or to destroy the foundations of social order; they do not curse all mankind because they themselves are unhappy; they are uninteresting and spiritless; they prove themselves possessed of strength of mind that sacrifices the most violent passion to duty and honor, and this is too matter-of-fact to please at the present day. Nobody pities the torments of these separated lovers; the heroism, generosity, and delicacy of *Bérénice* find no admirers, and the grief of the master of the world, who loses a mistress he has loved already five years, and can choose her successor among all the women of the empire, is still less understood.

With such a change in times and opinions it is not to be wondered at that when "*Bérénice*" was last revived, nearly fifty years had elapsed since that masterpiece had been presented to the public, and that the revival was not a successful one. All the interest of former days had long ago died with those who excited it. The insatiate grave had closed over Louis and his courtiers, over the illustrious and virtuous princess who had perished by so foul a death,

over the lovely and gentle La Vallière who had so fully expiated her one error—the chaste love depicted by Racine had ceased, not only to be felt, but to be believed in.

Against this formidable coalition of circumstances the young actress was called to struggle—no one appreciated the obstacles ; she was required to excite sympathy and enthusiasm, and the materials furnished her were the cold ashes of passions over which nearly two centuries had passed !

To all these objections may still be added a stronger one still as regarded the actress—the part of *Bérénice* was wholly unsuited to her. It is animated by one passion only throughout the play, a passion as gentle as it is strong—love in its most tender expression, unmixed with anger, scorn, resentment ; never manifested with unfeminine violence. In this rôle Rachel could find none of the grand effects she made such fine use of in *Camille*, *Hermione*, *Roxane*, and portions of *Marie Stuart*. *Bérénice* personifies abnegation in its most sublime form, therefore *Bérénice* remains calm, dignified, and serene, even in her deepest grief. She is the heroine of a love, honorable and devoted, of duty, firm and unswerving ; her heroism is not noisy and tem-

pestuous, albeit it has its struggles. *Bérénice* is the very opposite of *Dido* or of *Phèdre*; she cannot shed the same tears. This last shade of difference may appear of little moment, yet it is all-important. It could not be expected that Mademoiselle Rachel would succeed where not one of her own grand dramatic characteristics was brought into play, and it seems incomprehensible she could have undertaken the part.

Mademoiselle Rachel probably chose "*Bérénice*" on account of a fancied resemblance between the subject of that play and that of "*Andromaque*." *Bérénice*, is, it is true, like *Hermione*, forsaken, but the causes that influence the lovers are as different as the characters of the princesses. *Hermione* is sacrificed to another love—*Bérénice* to duty—the widow of *Hector* is the rival of *Hermione*—that of *Bérénice* is virtue. The passions excited are very dissimilar, and the qualities that make an excellent *Hermione* must make a poor *Bérénice*.

Among the remarks of the press suggested by the performance of Mademoiselle Rachel was one that proves her political opinions at that time were somewhat different from the very democratic ones she found it to her advantage to exhibit four

years later: "The lines—*De cette nuit Phénice* were well spoken, only when she says: *le peuple!* Mademoiselle Rachel should utter the words with more enthusiasm. *Le peuple* is not in this case the people of the *emuetes* and of the *carrefours*, it is the great Roman nation, and in this sense the contempt with which it is mentioned is out of place."

In June the tragedy of "Catherine II." was brought out, with Mademoiselle Rachel as the heroine. There really seemed a fatality attached to her creations in the modern drama, and it may be said with truth that, with the exception of *Virginie*, perhaps not one of the characters written expressly for the great actress, during the whole course of her dramatic career, was suited to or worthy of her.

On the 17th of February she appeared in the rôle of *Isabelle* in "Don Sanche d'Aragon" which was never repeated. This, one of the inferior plays of Corneille, had neither in the plot or character one trait suited to Mademoiselle Rachel. It had been altered to suit the modern stage by M. Naptal-Planat, but was not more successful in its new dress than before.

Poor Catherine II. has been the prey of



novelists, dramatists and poets without count. She has been dragged in the kennel and made the paramour of low-born, brutal soldiers; she has been accused of perpetrating every crime, of stooping to every weakness; no pity was shown her, she was a monster—there is no rest for the wicked—was the argument of her persecutors, she shall be tormented by the pen of every scribbler, even to the end of time.

*Certes*, the Russians themselves must be very much astonished at the liberties taken with the character of the great queen of whom they are so justly proud. They must be amazed at the zeal with which these confounders of history pursue the memory of her who was a theme of praise with the philosophers of her day, the Queen of Sheba of the wise Diderot and the witty Voltaire, the elegant and refined woman who introduced into a barbarous court the courteous and polished manners of that of Louis XV.

As a woman she was weak, as an empress she was great indeed. In her soft, gloved hand, the brutal rebellious Boyards were held as in a steel vice, while before her determined will the vast forces of the Ottoman Empire retreated dismayed, and the ancient limits of Russia were carried beyond the Caucasus—her heart knew no fear,

recoiled before no obstacle. Her great crime, the one that has raised such a storm of virtuous indignation over her tomb, was that she put to death her husband. But of all the crimes of the kind with which the history of nations is filled, not one is so excusable, so justifiable as that of Catherine II. She acted in self-defence—her life was weighed against his, and she inclined the scale in her favor; between killing and being killed, she chose the former; she turned the weapon raised against her own life against that of her assassin. The insults and outrages she had suffered from that barbarian were such as no woman, especially one of her temper, ever forgives. Poetry, and history itself, have found excuses for far greater crimes than hers. Those who reproach Catherine with the murder of Peter III., a hideous tyrant, whose death was the deliverance of all Russia and the salvation of numerous victims already marked by him for death in its most fearful forms, forget that this fortunate revolution was accomplished with the loss of a single life that was the curse of a whole nation. Those who take such strange delight in painting her failings in the strongest light, leave her manifold great deeds in the shadow. This is a miserable, one-sided way of reading the annals of time, and an

irreverent and silly jesting with its most important and solemn events.

M. Romand followed the beaten path, and treated this grand historical figure as uncereemoniously as his predecessors. It is painful to have to analyse this wretched perversion of truth. In absurdity of plot, in want of taste, style, skill, imagination, poetry, rhythm, this author had outdone all the stupid productions of former years. Could his "Catherine II." be played in the style of a parody, as the "Auberge des Adrets" was once played, it would, without the changing of a single word, prove the most amusing farce that could be put upon the stage. It was not the fault of Rachel if she failed in a part where there was not a situation, a thought, a line worthy of a tolerable actress. But she made a great mistake in accepting it, and proved a great want of dramatic instinct, not to say taste, in so doing. Talma and Mademoiselle Mars never thus compromised their talents. The youth and complete literary ignorance of Mademoiselle Rachel might prove some excuse for her; but no motive could be found that could induce a manager, a *comité de lecture*, to receive such a piece. Low, indeed, must be the degree of debasement and degradation to which literary taste was reduced when such a play was endured to the end.

It is true that no hisses were ever heard then—the house, filled on “first nights” from pit to gallery, with friends and paid admirers, has no seats for the real public. As for criticism, the cautious circumspection with which it touched upon the demerits of the work would be incomprehensible were it not to be conjectured that the amiable temper of the author and his success in two previous works had disarmed his judges. Criticism, however, while it respects the person and private character of an author, is bound to treat his works with severity, truth, and impartiality.

The sole aim of the author of “*Catherine II.*” seems to have been the creation of a part for one person. By the adaptation of that part to Made-moiselle Rachel’s peculiar line, and thereby affording scope for her powers, it was expected that she would give relief to the play on the mutual support system—a very mistaken plan in all cases where every other character is sacrificed to one.

The sum and substance of the play, disentangled and made clear—no easy matter—is the following: Young *Iwan*, who has some rights to the imperial throne occupied by *Catherine*, has been confined in a fortress from his infancy. In his prison he addresses his laments to the passing clouds, to the mild spring, to the mountain flowerets

of Russia. The empress, in love with her prisoner, in the character of a young and simple-hearted ignorant maiden, visits him in his dungeon, and of course fascinates the unsuspecting *Iwan*. The situation has the merit of being a novel one, and as such does honor to the invention of the author—the despotic Czarina, cooing like a turtle-dove in the dungeon of the cousin whom her revolted great vassals are at the time conspiring to seat on her throne. The love-making being all on the lady's side, is also something unknown in the code of French gallantry, besides which it turns out that the said lady is no longer free to offer her heart; she has already a master, and one as despotic as herself, who follows her like her shadow, and, when she goes clandestinely to talk platonic sentiment with her young cousin, is at her elbow, dodging behind doors, eaves-dropping, &c.—and the great, the all-powerful *Catherine* tamely submits to being brow-beaten and insulted in the foulest terms by a tall brute of a soldier!

Truly Mademoiselle Rachel, accustomed to the high-toned respect, the refined delicacy, the submissive deference of the Greek and Roman lovers of Racine and Corneille, must have felt some surprise at hearing herself treated like a camp-follower. But this is the modern style of literature, and

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when, as it usually does, it chooses its heroines in the kennel, it may be very appropriate.

In the third and fourth acts we have quite as extraordinary flights of fancy. *Catherine* has resolved that she will have a decisive and public manifestation of *Iwan's* admiration. A grand *fête* is given, at which all the beauties of the Court are assembled, and the Czarina herself, laying aside for an hour the external attributes of power, confiding in the sole prestige of her natural charms, mingles unostentatiously with the throng of her fair subjects. *Iwan* is introduced, and is then and there to say which of the ladies he will choose for his bride! If these are the privileges granted to State prisoners in Russia they are not much to be pitied—a call from the Empress in the morning, a sleigh-ride at noon, a ball in the evening, and a bride at his choice among the first and fairest of a Court! No wonder *Iwan* imagined he was made a mock of for the amusement of the Court. The rascally *Orloff*, *Catherine's* discarded lover, sets the stranger right—he tells him his pure maiden-love is the imperial widow who has murdered her husband. *Iwan* thereupon insults *Catherine* before all the Court with impunity. This tissue of absurdities winds up with the murder of *Iwan* by *Orloff*.

The character of *Iwan* is as mistaken as that of *Catherine*. Condemned to captivity from early infancy, his only accomplishment consisted in playing checkers. When *Catherine* visited him she found him half an idiot.

It was in the summer of this year that Rachel was tempted to take the part of one of Molière's *suivantes*. She appeared in *Marinette* in "Le Dèpit Amoureux." *Phèdre* and *Marinette* in the same evening! To unite two such opposites in one person may be possible, but not in one like Rachel. Had Nature intended her for an amusing *Marinette* she would not have given the attributes of the panting, trembling, passion-laden Greek queen; the noble, severe brow, the deep eye, the lip paled by emotion and fevered by the utterance of tragic anathemas, curled at times by scorn, but never parted by the light laugh. The sceptre, the crown, the dagger, the pallium and the royal mantle can never be advantageously replaced by the bundle of keys, the scissors, the short gown and petticoat, the smart cap and natty apron.

In the early part of July Mademoiselle Rachel left for Brussels. The six performances she gave there amounted to 40,000fr., averaging 6,666fr. each. The seats were all taken beforehand for

the whole time of her stay, and the enthusiasm she created was no less warm than on former occasions. At Lille she played four times, each performance averaging 5,000fr., divided equally between the actress and the management.

It was not until the 28th of December that Mademoiselle Rachel made her *rentrée* in Paris. She played on the boards of the Grand Opera for the first time. The occasion was the benefit of Desmousseaux, an actor of the Théâtre Français.



## CHAPTER XV.

1845.

Reconciliation with the Public—Classicists and Romanticists—  
 “*Virginie*”—“*Oreste*.”

FROM the beginning of the year 1840 to the beginning of 1845, Mademoiselle Rachel, notwithstanding her great success abroad and in the Departments, had had much to contend with at home—*home*, that is the home of the *artiste*, Paris. Some of the grounds for this have been already given; another important one remains to be explained. Mademoiselle Rachel was the organ of the classicists, their support, their only hope. She was, therefore, warmly sustained by them. On the other hand, the partisans of the romantic school, those who had declared Corneille *antediluvian*, and Racine *obsolete*, attacked their works in the person of the oracle of the dethroned deities; they contested her triumphs, exaggerated

her failings, and refused to see her merits. This party had allies in the very head-quarters of their adversaries—in the Théâtre Français itself. The management, while it offered to the public Mademoiselle Rachel with Racine and Corneille, was eager to take advantage of the vogue of Victor Hugo. The warmer the contest between the antagonistic schools, the larger were the receipts of the house when each assembled its followers to decry and condemn, to praise and applaud. The drama required melodramatic actors, and the indignant classicists beheld the darlings of the theatres of the Boulevards, Madame Dorval, M. and Madame Gorgon, Madame Mélingue, invading the historic boards hitherto held sacred to the tragic muse, to the genius of Molière. Before these interpreters of a new faith every door was opened wide, every barrier levelled, every obstacle removed; while, on the contrary, those actors who could have rendered able assistance to the classic school, who could perhaps have revived in the public a taste for the old masterpieces, were kept away under all sorts of pretexts—no talent that might attract the notice of the public was permitted to stand near Mademoiselle Rachel, whether influenced by the avaricious feeling that grudged the slightest portion of public favor to another, or fearful that

encouragement might kindle into a flame some latent spark as yet ignored even by its possessor, she suffered no actor or actress of even tolerable excellence to appear on the boards with herself. The system was fatal, not only to all talent, but to tragic art. Whenever it was not her turn to speak, the public manifested utter contempt for what was going on.

The cool indifference, not to call it by a stronger name, with which Rachel herself gave the example of this conduct was productive of incidents that excited the derisive laughter of the audience. She came on and went off the stage with so little care of what the other actors were doing that she destroyed all effect, leaving perhaps *Cinna* and the *Emperor Augustus tête à tête* in the most difficult moment, when the *Emperor* has said his say and the treacherous conspirator has nothing further to add.

This system strengthened the arguments of the partisans of Victor Hugo and Dumas, and it required all Mademoiselle Rachel's talent to sustain the cause of the classic drama.

In 1845, after five years of struggles, during which the pens of her decriers had known no rest, she seemed to have exhausted their animosity. Even Jules Janin, changing sides with his usual

suddenness and vehemence, was once more loud in her praise; from that time her reign was uninterrupted, her throne secure.

The spring of this year was marked by her appearance in "*Virginie*," a tragedy by M. Latour de St. Ybars, founded on an episode of Roman history immortalised by the genius of Livy. This play was an imitation of the "*Lucrèce*" of M. Ponsard. These oft-told tales, these worn-out themes are associated in the memory of our childhood's grief, with many a sorrowful hour of penance, with many a tear shed, not over the hapless fate of the heroine, but over our own that bound us to the wearying page when the bright sun and the song of birds—happy birds that learned no lessons!—wooed us into the free air to add our childish voice to Nature's hymn of joy. But modern times in vain proffered scenes as tragical, passions as violent; the bloody crimes it has pleased capricious man, reversing his own laws, to sanctify and to glorify throughout long ages, the suicide of the patrician dame, and the infanticide perpetrated by the plebeian father, the one inaugurating the Republic, the other overthrowing the power of the Decemvirs, both adopted as the pretexts, but neither of them the real causes of revolutions, these were the novelties Messieurs Ponsard

and Latour St. Ybras chose to revarnish and vamp up as being best suited to the display of Made-moiselle Rachel's peculiar style of tragic excellence.

With what success M. Ponsard executed his task we shall not at present discuss. On his equally difficult one M. Latour St. Ybars exhausted all his flowers of rhetoric, all his collegiate erudition. Every reminiscence of ancient lore, every record of the habits, manners, and language of those partly civilised barbarians, the customs of the forum, of the battle-field, and of the interior of their houses, are pressed into his service; the household lares and the pots and pans of *Herculaneum* and *Pompeii*, were scrubbed up and crowded into the picture without regard to cost and with indefatigable industry. Modern works on ancient history, or on the middle ages, resemble the catalogue of the auction sale of an old curiosity-shop. *Corneille* and *Racine* disdained this clap-trap schoolboy erudition; they had a rich store of ideas and cared not to shew themselves Roman upholsterers, tailors, and milliners. Modern poets have greater abundance of words; yet all their crowns of oaken leaves, their vervain, saffron, barley, &c., &c., are not worth a fine Latin expression skilfully conveyed into French;

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real beauties are sacrificed to tinsel and meretricious ornament. The work of restoration is conscientiously performed and the result has been about as beneficial to the present age as such restorations usually prove.

The first scene of "Virginia" opens with a monologue in which the soldier's daughter, about to quit her paternal home to accompany  *Icilius*, her betrothed, to the altar, invokes her household divinities. Here the poet found a capital opportunity to string together an astounding number of Roman formulas, articles of creed, points of belief, forms and fashions. The emptiness of this accumulation of sonorous old scraps of latinity gathered from the *Gradus ad Parnassum*, is not noticed amid the grandiloquence of the language that comes with a certain grace and propriety from the lips of the young Roman maiden, arrayed in her graceful garb so accurately copied, and giving full relief to the lines with her proud brow and intelligent look. The old senator, *Fabius*, who comes to complain that he has not been invited to grace with his presence the nuptials of his client's daughter, is not lacking in eloquence, though the history of the war, and the deeds of his house, is rather lengthy and pompous, and seems, moreover, uncalled for under the

circumstances. *Virginus*, on his side, is not to be outdone in eloquence; when reproached by *Claudius* with wasting his hours in domestic joys, he takes occasion to enumerate a series of ultra-Roman circumstances and particulars, quite as foreign to the subject as his patron's harangue.

Thus urged, however, *Virginus* hastens to lead his daughter to the altar, leaving the enamoured Decemvir to inform his client, *Maxime*, and the anxious public, of the means he has taken to prevent the marriage which he had apparently seemed to hasten. The maiden is seemingly beyond his reach. She is on her way to the temple, led by *Fabius*, escorted by her father and her promised husband, and preceded by the priestess of Vesta. But *Claudius* has taken his measures in time; he has the previous eve summoned the obedient *Flamine* and commanded that a prodigy shall prevent the present union of the lovers. The father cannot wait, he will leave Rome for the camp with his intended son-in-law, and the maiden will be left to the tender mercies of the wicked.

The scenes that follow show the Decemvir has been obeyed—the gods have manifested their opposition. The return of the bridal *cortége*, the maiden driven from the temple by lying auguries,

the old soldier parting from his child and committing her to the protection of his lares ere he returns to his military duties; *Virginia*, filled with sad presentiments, mute and motionless, all these have a fine dramatic effect and constitute a good first act.

With the second act commences the criminal manœuvres of *Claudius*. *Virginia* enters and relates to her nurse how a beldame has met her on her way, and, in the name of *Claudius*, insulted her with the offer of his heart, his wealth, and his power. The passage in which *Virginia* rejects with scorn and indignation the gifts the tempter has sent in her absence are fine;

“ Et ces ornements vils qu’il m’ose présenter,  
Sont faits de ce métal qui sert pour acheter !  
Va rendre à Claudius tous ces dons, et sur l’heure  
Les présents de cet homme ont souillé ma demeure ;  
Et ce serait blesser notre honneur et nos dieux  
Que d’y porter la main, que d’y jeter les yeux.”

The interview that follows between *Claudius* and his doomed victim is a long one, and the death of her lover, of which he informs *Virginia* to prove to her she is free to return his love, is confirmed by the vestal sister of  *Icilius*. At the revelation of the bloody catastrophe that realises her sad presentiments and sundry threatening auguries, *Virginia* extends her hand towards the



sister and fixing her dilated eyes on the guilty Decemvir, exclaims: "I believe you!" The effect of this sudden outcry of the soul was very fine as given by Mademoiselle Rachel; the intelligence, the indignation, the expression of passion in the eye of the young tragic actress, gave to these simple words an extraordinary breadth and power.

Though the main argument is not developed in the second act, these preliminary events prepare the spectator for the more violent manifestation of the passion of *Appius Claudius* and for the final catastrophe.

The third act is skilfully and boldly written, though the poet diverges from the path of history to add new interest. The chaste maiden is not permitted to await the sentence of the judge in the hallowed and safe retreat her father's house affords. She must be exposed to the horrors of a night passed in the power of her licentious persecutor ere she passes from a life of innocence through the gates of a violent death. The *finale* of the third act, when old *Fabius*, anxious for the honor of his client's daughter, left to his charge, whispers:

"Take this steel;" and *Virginia* answers:

"I am free," excited great applause. Another

passage in which Mademoiselle Rachel produced an extraordinary sensation is that where *Virginia*, confronted with *Maxime* who claims her as his slave, exclaims thrice, and each time with increased indignation :

“He lies ! he lies ! he lies !”

At the rise of the curtain in the fourth act it is night, and the *iron lamp* casts its beams over the desolate home. *Virginius*, who has, in blissful unconsciousness, escaped all the snares laid by his enemies, returns from the army. Full of hope, and joy, ignorant of the death of his son-in-law, of the danger of his daughter, he enters his home. The manner in which the evil tidings are communicated by *Fabius* to the wretched parent, the despair of the two friends, the terrible suspense while thought recoils and hesitates between the two equally to be dreaded alternatives, of the death or dishonor of the beloved maiden, show dramatic skill. The return of *Virginia*, still pure, to the arms of her father is very effective, and her narrative of the events of the night afford scope to the poetical genius of the author. The fine description of the wooing of the Decemvir and the suicidal threat of the maid came with splendid effect from the lips of Mademoiselle Rachel. Here she was in her element, the whole

of this part was admirably adapted to her style.

In the fifth act the assembled people await the important decision. The iniquitous judge is in the tribunal and *Virginia* will learn whether she is a free Roman or a slave. But the trial of the past night has exhausted her energy; fear invades her heart; she hesitates to leave her happy home; she trembles, she would delay; she feels that she is doomed; that to yon cruel's man's will there is no resistance; from him there is no refuge, no appeal. She turns to her father, to *Fabius*, to her nurse, to all who love her, imploring mercy, protection! Alas, none can save, and she is compelled to bid a weeping farewell to her home,—the home she knows she will never more enter. This beautiful passage was delivered in tones of deeper tenderness than Mademoiselle Rachel had hitherto been thought capable of expressing. Her accents of passionate, melting eloquence, moved her audience to tears.

The fifth act is foreseen. The poet had it ready to his hand written in the happiest style of the Roman historian. The merit of M. Latour consists in his having adhered so strictly to his text; he could not follow a better guide; he has had the good sense at this critical moment to refrain from all pedantic enumerations, all cum-

bersome accessories which would have marred the tragic effect of the simple fact. He goes straight to the point; his heroine kneeling and imploring the merciful intervention of the people is true to nature; she indulges in no superfluities of language; she weeps and waits with resignation the decision, not of the Decemvir—she knows no hope is there—but that of the people. Here ends the part of the daughter and here begins that of the Roman father. The scene between the parent and child should be short, for the Decemvir's lictor is listening; moreover such agony will not bear prolongation—if the father hesitates, the daughter is doubly lost.

*Virginie.*

Ma mère \* \* \* il faut mourir.

*Claudius.*

Emmenez cette esclave.

*Virginus* (stabbing his daughter).

Elle est libre !

The cry of the people, "Death to the tyrant," appropriately closes the tragic scene. The success of "Virginie" was real, was complete. Since "Lucrèce" no modern tragedy had met with such acceptionation from a French audience; but "Lucrèce" was in a few days laid upon the shelf, while "Virginie," sustained by the talent of

Mademoiselle Rachel, was long played. In this rôle, which was admirably well adapted, especially in some of the scenes—that with *Appius Claudius*, for instance—to her powers, the actress rose to the full height of her excellence. She displayed her indomitable energy, her perseverance, her strength of will. She felt that she had her reputation at stake. She had failed in the creations she had hitherto brought out. Whether the failures were attributable to the plays or to the actress, the evil results were no less keenly felt by her, and she saw the necessity of proving that the fault was not in her, but in the materials given her. She felt her sunlight was paling. The public, ever ready to dispel its own illusions, to destroy the idol it had worshipped, was beginning to show carelessness and indifference. Some great effort was requisite to rouse it from a torpor which, long continued, would have proved fatal. Had she again failed, defeat would have severely shaken, if not utterly killed, her prosperity. She rose with the peril of the crisis, and, achieving the most glorious triumph, seized with firmer grasp the sceptre that was sliding from her hand.

The success of “*Virginie*” contented the public for some months. In June Mademoiselle Rachel

carried it into Brittany. She spent her *cong  * at Nantes and Brest. Her triumph was somewhat less agreeable from the fact that it was shared in Lyons by the actor Ligier, in whose praise the provincials were so enthusiastic that the Parisian critics were much amused. The idea of placing Ligier on a line with Mademoiselle Rachel fully warranted the ridicule with which it was visited.

On the 6th of June Mademoiselle Rachel took a part in the celebration of the anniversary of Corneille—a celebration be it remembered to her honor, she had been the first to think of introducing. She was so charmed at this time by the success of *Virginie* that she forgot how inappropriate was the costume of this *r  le* to the circumstance, and appeared in it in the pageant got up in remembrance of Corneille in lieu of choosing that of *Camille*.

During the absence of Mademoiselle Rachel her sister made her *d  but* at La Gai  t  , in "Le Canal St. Martin."

At her *rentr  e*, on the 6th of September, the favorite again found her Parisian public cold and sulky. The play was "Virginie." The first act was received with indifference, but the talent of the actress, her evident wish to please, dispelled the cloud at last, and the plaudits were loud and pro-

longed. It was, probably, an excellent thing for Rachel that she was now never received at the very outset with premeditated applause, but was compelled to earn it by dint of talent and labor. She was obliged to study, and dared not play carelessly.

In this month she appeared again in *Phèdre*, a rôle she had not acted for eighteen months. The improvement she had made was already very perceptible, although she had not reached the perfection in it which she subsequently attained. The house was filled to suffocation. This was the case now whenever Rachel was to play, otherwise the Théâtre Français was a desert. There was no medium—the house was full or empty. “*Phèdre*” was much applauded, and the criticisms of the *feuilletons* gave her great credit for her performance in the difficult scene of the declaration, in that of the imprecations against her muse, in the scene where she comes on to die—in fact in all the passages where there is more energy than tenderness she was pronounced admirable.

On the 25th of October she again played on the boards of the Opera-house. The performance was for the benefit of Massol, and the play was “*Les Horaces*.” During the first three acts the public was attentive but encouraging; at the

fourth the applause was tremendous. The effect this fine tragedy produced on the stage was partly attributable to the superiority of its acoustic construction. This point is not so much attended to where the house is not exclusively intended for music, and it is a great pity it should be so, as the enjoyment is much diminished at times by the difficulty of hearing distinctly in every part of the house what is said on the stage.

We have noted so minutely the fluctuations of public favor and the difficulties against which the candidate is called to struggle, as an encouragement to future aspirants whose patience and perseverance may be in danger of giving way before a discontented audience. The example afforded in this instance may prove useful to others. It is said that "faint heart never won fair lady"—the public is harder to satisfy, and far more exacting, than the veriest coquette.

The close of this year witnessed a vain attempt to resuscitate Voltaire's tragedy of "Orestes," which had not been acted since the year 1750. Rachel, tempted by the rôle of *Electra*, did not reflect on the innumerable difficulties she would encounter in bringing to life this dead play. She made incredible efforts, and only succeeded in galvanizing it momentarily. All her talent could



not make it acceptable with the public; she spent her breath on cold ashes. The part of *Electra* is monotonous, destitute of grandeur or majesty; its passion is worn and threadbare, its terror and grief lack the semblance of reality—this spectre of the past bears an empty urn, and it was in vain that the actress who had evoked it endeavored to excite sympathy or interest in an audience astonished at its own indifference. *Certes*, had the play been almost any other, the case would have been otherwise, for on no other occasion had Rachel displayed the energy, the talent, the courage and perseverance with which, night after night, she endeavored to support this unfortunate “*Orestes*.” She had studied well the character of the Grecian princess animated by one sole feeling—vengeance. Even amid the rapturous joy the recognition of her brother causes, the implacable, the ruling idea preserves its sway—she is already longing to place the dagger in the hand of her newly-found brother—it is the avenger rather than the brother she embraces. In the bitterness with which she replied to *Clytemnestra*, the cold haughtiness and crushing disdain with which she addressed *Egythus*, the eager affection she manifested to *Orestes* bearing the ashes of *Plithènes*, the one predominating thought

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is ever uppermost. The spirit of the Greek dramatists was better expressed by the actress than by the author.

The character of *Electra* contained in itself all the elements Mademoiselle Rachel could best use ; her great powers had full scope, for here was every passion she excelled in expressing, while she suffered no restraint and was compelled to no effort to curb nature or delineate the softer feelings. Here, if there are tears, they are the few burning drops impotent rage lets fall. That Mademoiselle Rachel rose to her full height in *Electra*, and that no character could suit her better, all the critics of the day allowed : but the public had determined against the play itself, and no effort could change that determination.

She had dressed her part admirably, and her cold, sad, grey costume, bordered with red, her slight, delicate arms imprisoned in iron links ; her fixed, stern gaze, and brow full of strong will, gave her the appearance of a young Nemesis.

But all was in vain. She had undertaken an impossibility. *Orestes* was a rock on which all her talent was wrecked. The amount of energy spent here would have set up a worse play on another theme. The other actors, amazed and terrified at the determined perseverance of Rachel

and the apathy of the public, hastened through their parts, eager to get off the stage. One alone seemed to share the anxiety, the impotent resolution of Rachel—the young Rebecca aided her efforts with the despair of a child who sees her sister drowning and would rescue her at any cost. At one time, overcome by emotion, seeing Rachel's unavailing efforts, she threw herself in her arms with a cry of anguish so real there was no mistaking the poor girl's feeling. The house resounded with applause for some minutes.

And every time the play was given these desperate efforts were repeated, for Rachel had chosen it, and she would not be gainsaid—she would not admit she was wrong. Unfortunately she bore within herself the worst obstacle to the continuation of this battle with the will of the public. Her frail organisation was opposed to her strong will—her voice, exerted so valiantly, at times, utterly failed her—the passion that burned within found no utterance. Alas, all this talent, this instinctive knowledge of dramatic art, this eloquence in its expression, all were hanging on a breath. Even then was foreshadowed the dread disease that was to make such havoc in that delicate constitution.

Mademoiselle Rachel might, perhaps, have suc-

ceeded in persuading her audience that Voltaire's wretched imitation of the magnificent works of Sophocles and Euripides was worth the sublime works of Corneille, that this wretched verse was worth the polished, elegant lines of Racine, had she been ably supported. But the error her selfishness had committed was now visited on her own head. She had wished to stand alone in her triumphs, she stood alone to support this crushing weight. She fought for her *Electra* as the faithful fought for their vanquished gods, and found strength in the imminence of the peril—but the dastards by whom she was surrounded did not even make a stand for the defence of their own insulted altars, beneath the shelter of their own profaned temple. Under such circumstances, without an army, without captains or soldiers, in a bad cause, victory was impossible, defeat was inevitable.

## CHAPTER XVI.

1846

**"Jeanne d'Arc"—Rachel in Holland—The Théâtre Français a Land of Promise—Dissensions with the Management—A Soul of Fire in an Envelope of Gauze—Mademoiselle Clairon and the Duke of Choiseul—Rumoured Conversion—Cheap Proselytism—Amenaide without a Tancrède—Death of Mademoiselle Mars—Retirement of Joanny and Mademoiselle Georges.**

IN March of this year the "Jeanne d'Arc," of Alexander Soumet was revived, with Mademoiselle Rachel as the heroine. The annals of France present no finer subject for tragedy than Jeanne d'Arc—on no other page will be found such grand elements of inspiration ; religion, loyalty, heroism, virtue, are all united here ; yet no poet, either in past or present times, has been found to make good use of these splendid and abundant materials. There is not a poem or a tragedy in any language that does justice to the resplendent creature that casts so glorious a halo over her age. The fame

of the heroine has received no new lustre, no confirmation from the degenerate lips that have undertaken to sing her praises. They have succeeded in dwarfing the more than human proportions of the figure they sought to re-produce—they seem to have looked at this grand image through an inverted opera-glass, and to have given us the Liliputian statuette they saw there. Nay, among the most gifted children of the God of song, among those who could best have handled a theme worthy of a second Homer, one was found so lost to all sense of patriotism, honor, honesty, gratitude, and truth, so degraded in mind, so perverted in heart, so crazed by mistaken vanity, so sunk to the lowest depths of cynicism, as to spit venom on the immaculate fame of that sainted maiden-warrior who rescued his forefathers from the yoke of the usurper, who gave new being, new birth to France, and raised her children from the oblivion in which they and their memories had else perished. That one wretched poem suffices to stamp infamy on the name of Voltaire.

Of all the unsuccessful, weak, paltry trash that has since been perpetrated on this theme, M. Soumet's tragedy is perhaps the worst. This wretched compound of unskilful lies, trivial inven-

tions, and childish contrivances could not be successful even when administered by Rachel.

In the soul-stirring pages of a prose writer, of a Michelet only can we find realised our conception of the representative of all the good sense, if not all the courage, of the France of 1429. His pen, inspired by real genius, guided by the spirit of everlasting truth, has been found worthy to evoke this sublime image; on his palette alone have been found colors to paint the thunder-laden, blood-tinged clouds through which shone the star that led France onwards to a glorious regeneration.

When from the grand prose of Michelet we descend to the puny, halting, miserable pathos of Soumet, we cannot but recoil with disgust from any analysis of his production, and hastily turn away from these five acts, filled with gibbets, dungeons, parliaments and stakes. Though not a superior production, Schiller's "Joan of Arc" is still a masterpiece compared to that of Soumet. The German poet has brought before us the whole life of the maid. We have the already chosen girl in the humble home of her childhood, placing on her fair tresses the golden helmet she has found, and dreaming of the English masters of the fair fields and towns of France, of the dishonored crown of her kings, of the Jesabel queen-

mother. She sees, she feels, she understands all the long, fearful series of treasons, bloody battles, defeats, pitiless massacres, devastations, pillages, and woes numberless and unutterable. The hand of God has lit within her heart the sacred and unextinguishable fire; she rises and follows without hesitation the guiding voice that cries out to her from the desert. This is better than mere poetry—it is historical truth, and herein consists the merit of the German author—herein, too, lies the crime of the degenerate Frenchman whose touch contaminates or conceals these great records of the past. Who shall dare deny the divine inspiration when a nation becomes regenerate at her voice, and its dead hopes rekindle at her breath! The sunken and desponding people that had lost all faith in its king, its priests, and even in its God, hails the envoy of pitying Heaven and recognises her mission. She baffles the world-wise wisdom of theologians by her prompt judgment; women admire her modesty, men her valor, the people at large her saint-like beauty. We repeat it—the German poet has followed history and found a road to every heart. The Frenchman followed the by-paths of his own petty invention and wandered into the realms of obscurity and dullness.



Unfortunately it was not the tragedy of Schiller that Mademoiselle Rachel was to present to the public; it was the nondescript work of Soumet, and she could not invest it with every quality it lacked or conceal all the faults it had. She made as good use as it was possible of the materials given her; her action was full of energy, yet she had the calm, the patience, and the dignity the character demanded. She looked remarkably well in her gold and silver armour, her coat of mail and gauntlets, and a too great consciousness of this made her commit the error of retaining it after the first act, forgetting that *Jeanne* should appear before her judges in the garments of her sex—her armour was one of the charges brought against her by the infamous *Bishop Canchon*. In the scene with the *Duke of Burgundy*, in the third act, she was admirable. In the death scene she was a model of *statuesque* beauty, enveloped in the folds of the banner and sinking, overcome by the pitiless flames; the banner itself, however, is an absurdity, as contrary to good sense as it is to the truth of history. In the first place no one can imagine how the French banner can be in the hands of the helpless prisoner of the English. What the poor victim really held is recorded. “She asked

for the cross. An Englishman handed her a cross which he made out of a stick ; she took it, rudely fashioned as it was, with not the less devotion, kissed it and placed it under her garments, next to her skin."—"History of France," by M. Michelet, vol. ii. p. 152). There is no doubt that had the reality been presented Mademoiselle Rachel would have made as picturesque a use of the rude emblem of salvation as she did of the banner, and the effect would have been far more pathetic. But that the actress had a great fancy for the theatrical effect she imagined she produced enveloped in the folds of the banner was proved two years after.

In the latter part of May, Mademoiselle Rachel set out for Holland, intending to spend there and in England a *congé* that was to last two months. She was received by the phlegmatic Dutch with the enthusiasm that had greeted her elsewhere—an enthusiasm which, at its pecuniary value, gave a result of 52,000 frs. in 15 days. She performed in Antwerp on the 20th.

In Lille, however, her success was from some cause or other not as productive to the management as had been expected. After the fourth performance, M. Bardon, the manager, having exposed the situation of affairs, by which it ap-

peared he had sustained considerable loss by the engagement made with her, Mademoiselle Rachel consented to give a fifth performance, the produce of which should be equally divided between the manager on one side, and M. Genies and her brother Raphael, who then accompanied her. She stipulated as a condition of this unwonted fit of generosity that the seats should be given at the usual prices, and that the subscribers should have a right, as on ordinary occasions, to their seats. Whether the Lillois still retained a lively sense of the injustice done them on former nights, or from some other cause of dissatisfaction, the house was not better filled on this last night than before, notwithstanding the concessions made.

On the following day Mademoiselle Rachel was attacked by what the physicians called sporadic cholera, and the symptoms were at first such as to excite great apprehension in her friends. Her prompt recovery, however, permitted of her pursuing her journey to London, where she performed twelve times in the space of three weeks.

The success of Rachel had, as we have already seen, developed in her brother and sisters an irresistible vocation for the stage, and one after the other they were forced upon the management of different houses at handsome salaries. Raphael,

who had made his *débüt* with Rebecca the preceding year at the Odeon, made his *débüt* this year in the first week of May on the boards of the Théâtre Français in "Les Horaces." Sarah was at the Gaiété; even little Dinah, who acted the part of the child threatened with a whipping by Argan in "Le Malade Imaginaire" had a share in the spoils of the Philistines. Another child of Israel, Mademoiselle Judith, also made her *débüt* this year. It was jestingly remarked that the synagogue was removed to the Théâtre Français. To one fortunate Hebrew family it had certainly proved a land of promise.

The continual exertions of Mademoiselle Rachel had told on her delicate constitution, and on her return to Paris in the first week of September she solicited a prolongation of her *congé* for two months, in order to take the rest she so much needed. To this request the management replied, with tolerable good reason, that if Mademoiselle Rachel had overworked herself, it had hitherto been to fill her own pockets, and that she could not expect the house to be the loser. The object of a *congé* was to enable the actors to recruit their strength—not to exhaust it. The dispute waxed high—Mademoiselle Rachel brought forward the usual excuse of illness and could not, or would

n.c. play. The management made use of their right and sent the physician attached to the theatre to ascertain the truth of the alleged indisposition; he was not admitted, and, rather than submit to what she denominated exactions, the actress sent in her resignation as *sociétaire*, towards the close of September. This was the commencement of the dissensions between Mademoiselle Rachel in person, and the management. The blame could no longer, as during her minority, be thrown on her father. These quarrels, though occasionally healed, continued to break out during all the remainder of her dramatic career. The resignation sent in by Mademoiselle Rachel was merely intended to frighten the management into compliance with her demands. The threat was too ill grounded to be effective—the resignation was not valid. A clause of the decree of 1812—known as the decree of Moscow, and which is the charter of the Théâtre Français stipulates that when a *sociétaire* wishes to resign, the resignation must be notified “one year beforehand” and the notification must be also reiterated six months after. A *sociétaire* must have had the title ten years before he can resign. Mademoiselle Rachel had only had it eight years. She had been elected in 1842, but the title is retroactive and counts the time

from the entrance in the Théâtre Français. She had entered in 1838.

Notwithstanding this fit of the sulks, Mademoiselle Rachel came again before the public in October, in "Phèdre." The improvement each successive year witnessed in her performance of this, the finest as well as most difficult *rôle* in the classic *repertoire*, was hailed with delight by a numerous audience. Never had the applause been more frequent and sincere. It was on the occasion of her playing *Phèdre* in the succeeding month of November that the following anecdote was related:

The *tragédienne*, electrified by the breathless attention of her audience had never shown herself so great, so sublime. Inspired by the genius of antiquity she was the personification of this delirium of passion, this mad torrent of conflicting elements exhaling in volcanic accents disdain, rage, love, remorse, this tortured daughter of Pasiphal. Among those who seemed most deeply absorbed in the contemplation of this magnificent specimen of dramatic art that succeeded in drawing tears for sorrows, of which the subject stood back from the presence of the present generation a distance of thirty centuries, was a personage who, between the acts, divided with *Phèdre* the

attention of the audience. This was the Bey of Tunis, a man yet young, with the intelligent look, the pensive head, the sad smile, so frequently the characteristics of the Oriental. The fixity of his gaze seemed to denote that, notwithstanding his ignorance of the language, the eloquence of the countenance and gestures of the actress enabled him to understand the play. When the actress was recalled to receive the floral homage showered upon the stage, she could not help glancing at the Prince, who, resplendent with jewels, was so gravely attentive to all she did and said. One of the persons present in his box asking the Bey what his Highness thought of Rachel, he replied :

“It is a soul of fire in an envelope of gauze.”

The Prince's answer was diversely reported, another version being :

“It is the soul of an eagle in the body of a gazelle.”

The first is the most natural when it is considered what a frail, reed-like figure gave utterance to those violent passions.

The sending in of her resignation by Mademoiselle Rachel in a fit of anger brings to mind the letter of the Duke of Choiseul to Mademoiselle Clairon on a similar occasion, when that celebrated

actress wished to give up the stage she so much regretted afterwards. The minister's letter contained the following sensible advice:

"If I may be allowed to advise you, mademoiselle, remain where you are; believe me, and rest assured I speak to you as a true and loyal *confrère*; do we not both play the first parts on a great stage? with this difference, that you choose those you will act, and I am obliged to act them all; you appear and are loudly applauded, I am most usually hissed; and yet I remain on my stage. Imitate me and you will not repent having done so."

About this time it was currently reported that, abjuring the God of Abraham and of Isaac, renouncing the creed of seventy generations, Mademoiselle Rachel was about to become a Christian. As is usual in such cases, every particular was minutely given; the sponsors were known, the day, the hour, the church, the minister had been named, the *catechumene* had been seen with contrite look, clasped hands, rosary at her side, going to repeat her catechism in a house that was also well known—the young neophyte was to receive as a christening gift from her godfather diamonds to the amount of 50,000fr. A witty *feuilletonist*, recording this *newspaper* fact, added:



“Jean Jacques Rousseau became a convert for the sum of three francs in sous!”

Pending the confirmation of these reports, the subject of them was left neither quite a Christian nor yet a Jewess, hanging like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth.

In December, Mademoiselle Rachel again played *Amenaïde* in “*Tancrède*.” Five years had elapsed since that tragedy had been revived for her, but all her efforts to render it acceptable to the public were unavailing. Yet this “*Tancrède*,” founded on one of the most charming passages of Ariosto's poem, is one of Voltaire's best plays, and is really full of interest. *Amenaïde*, the chivalrous heroine of the middle ages, half Oriental and half French, is a very brilliant and fascinating character; yet, notwithstanding her passionate love, her despair, and her splendid costume, she could not, even when represented by Mademoiselle Rachel, find favor with the public. Not that the actress lacked talent in this rôle, or was wanting in zeal; the fault was not in her. What was wanting was a *Tancrède*. When the knight, whose great deeds and passionate love constitute the chief interest of the play, has so incompetent a representative on the stage, the audience cannot be made to accept it. The work has the effect of the

play announced by the manager of the itinerant company as the the play of "Hamlet" with the part of *Hamlet* left out. *Tancrède* might as well have been left out.

In the spring of this year the Théâtre Français lost three of its celebrities. Mademoiselle Mars, whose brilliant dramatic career had lasted nearly half a century, died in March of this year. She had retired from the stage some few years before. Joanny, the last remaining tragic actor of any excellence, the last of the *Horacii*, retired from the stage in the month of April. Mademoiselle Georges retired in the month of June. Her health no longer permitted her to undergo the fatigue that attended the discharge of her professional duties on the stage, but she opened a class of declamation. Among her pupils may be mentioned an actress of some repute in the United States—Miss Davenport—who took lessons of her in 1856.

## CHAPTER XVII.

1847.

"L'Ombre de Molière"—"Le Vieux de la Montagne"—  
 "Athélie"—"Célimène"—"Cléopâtre."

THE year 1847 was inaugurated at the Théâtre Français by the revival of Molière's "Don Juan," in its original form. The occasion was the anniversary of the author's birthday. A sort of eclogue, written by M. Barbier, preceded the play. Mademoiselle Rachel and Mademoiselle Brohan, personifying serious and light comedy; *Mercury*, the shade of Molière, and a poet, were the *dramatis personæ* in this little piece. Mademoiselle Rachel and Mademoiselle Brohan were dressed in costumes so faithfully imitated from the Muses of the Fontaine Molière, they seemed statues chiselled by Pradier. Prevost represented Molière with equal accuracy of costume.

The success of "Virginie" led its author to write,

and Mademoiselle Rachel to accept, another tragedy, "La Vieux de la Montagne," which was brought out at the Théâtre Français on the 6th of February, 1847. Of this play we are tempted to repeat what we said of Catherine II.—if it had been acted as a parody it would, without the alteration of a word, have proved a most amusing farce. Whether the exhilaration of success had rendered M. Latour careless, or whether his dramatic inspiration was short-winded, or from whatever cause it might proceed, he certainly produced a most soporific, dull, stupid play, destitute of style or grandeur, without any one tragic element, without one interesting personage or event. The verse is such as any rhyming schoolboy could equal, flat, insipid, common-place, showing sense constantly sacrificed to rhyme, and the latter not always successfully achieved. As for *poetry*, there is not a line in it from beginning to end. The events narrated are supposed to occur in a place and at a time famous in history—in a fortress of Mount Lebanon, during the first crusade of Saint Louis, but the *dramatis personæ* are of no age and of no country; indeed we question if such a set of double-distilled fools ever existed, save in M. Latour's imagination. As Mademoiselle Rachel thought fit to accept the part of

the heroine, we are bound to give some analysis of this tragedy.

*Fatima*, the daughter of *Hassan*, chief of the assassins, has, during a skirmish, fallen into the hands of a knight of the order of the Temple, the *Count de Suaraz*. The new *Scipio* sends home to her father, seatless and ransomless, the captive of his bow and spear. Since her return the fair maiden droops and pines of some fatal malady not in the books of the learned leaches summoned to restore her to health. The sapient doctors, not being able to minister to a mind diseased any better than the modern sons of *Esculapius*, and unwilling to confess their ignorance, accuse the Franks of having administered some secret poison to the prisoner ere they restored her to her father. This is related by *Hassan* for the information of the public, to his prime-minister *Bensin*, with whom, to judge by his familiarity, he appears to be on the most intimate terms. After narrating how quickly and safely he gets rid of his enemies with the help of his faithful band of assassins—by his own account fully justifying their appellation—the old villain begins to fear his many crimes are being visited on his daughter, and talks seriously of reforming and making war openly after a more respectable

fashion. He then inquires of his minister what progress has been made during his absence in a matter he has much at heart, namely, the winning the alliance of one *Ismael*, the chieftain of a horde of Bedouins. The minister reports that he, *Benitza*, has kept said *Ismael* in a state of paradisaical bliss, that is, opium-tipsy for four days, by way of conciliating his affections.

The next scene introduces the new ally just roused from his slumbers, and to him *Hassan* announces himself as a "Prince and a Prophet," the "shadow of God," *alias* the "Old man of the Mountain." Notwithstanding the omnipotence these titles infer, he requires the help of *Ismael* and of 2,000 of his lances, in requital for which service he will, now and then, induct said *Ismael* into the garden of Eden; *i.e.* give him a cup of opium. *Ismael* does not seem much impressed with the magnitude of the reward; he says, "he don't want Eden, he wants Miss *Fatima*." To this point-blank demand the loving father instantly acquiesces—he shall have *Fatima*. Even this does not satisfy *Ismael*, he imposes another condition—the Franks have incurred his displeasure; they have killed his father, they have seen *Fatima* unveiled; he desires that *Hassan* shall forthwith order the heads of all Christian

prisoners in the fortress to be chopped off and set as ornaments over the gates. The father-in-law elect, forgetting all his good resolutions, consents to everything without the least hesitation, and, as he does not do things by halves, he summons three true believers, picked men, first-class assassins, gives to each a dagger, and orders the one to go and take off the King of France before the walls of Jerusalem; the other to stab the Grand Master of the Knights Templar; to the third he recommends his daughter's late generous host, the *Count de Sabran*. Fortunately for the prisoners in the fortress, the orders for the wholesale murder are hardly given when *Fatima* enters. In answer to her fond papa's rather plainly-worded and indiscreet question :—

“As tu vu, dans les murs d'Alep ou de Napolouse,  
Quelque Emir qui t'ait fait souhaiter d'être  
épouse ?”

*Miss Fatima* replies she wants nothing. Finally, however, she has an indistinct remembrance that she has come for the purpose of asking the immediate liberation of the Christian prisoners; their groans prevent her sleeping. *Ismael* is rather disgusted at his intended's misplaced compassion, and while the point is being

discussed the doomed prisoners are marched across the stage. Among them is the young *Count de Sabran*. *Fatima* whispers to papa: "I love him!" Papa respites all the Christians, and countermands forthwith the orders given to the three assassins.

In the second act we have *M. de Sabran* in his prison. In this *rôle* the author cannot be accused of plagiarism—this member of the church militant is entirely of his own invention, and much too good to find a counterpart in books, and still less in nature. We fear there are few feminine hearts that do not admire Scott's fine creation of the Templar; notwithstanding his sins, the dark lover of Rebecca finds favor with all fair novel readers. But *M. Latour's* hero would accelerate the heart-beat of neither Jewess nor Gentile, despite his many virtues. This monkish knight in love with the charming pagan, talks continually of the cross, the Holy Sepulchre, chastity, eternity, and other edifying subjects. In vain the Old Man of the Mountain begs and intreats he will be so good as to accept his treasures and his daughter; in vain the maiden makes the same request; he is inflexible, inexorable. The complaisant father tells him he is free to follow his creed, that the Pope will cancel his vows, and, as a last argument, that



*Fatima* will die if he is obdurate. *Fatima* herself, who does not care a pin for Mahomet, offers to become a Christian; she is answered that her resolution is a snare of the evil one:

“Votre cœur vous abuse;

Des esprits de l'enfer, reconnaissons la ruse.”

In a word he'd rather die than be made happy; he sighs for martyrdom, and demands to be immediately assassinated by the assassins. The father thinks the farce has lasted long enough—so does the public—and orders the stubborn young fellow shall have his wish. Meanwhile, as *Fatima* must have a husband, he makes up again with *Ismael*.

As for the Templar, he will give him one hour more to make up his mind, to choose whether he will endure happiness or death!

“Et quand, l'heure écoulée, il faudra que je sorte,

Je veux que du chrétien on ait réglé le sort,

Je veux qu'il ait subi son bonheur ou la mort.”

Leaving the hero in this dilemma, the curtain drops on act the second.

After all this ado, no sooner is this exemplary knight alone with his confessor and the public—and *Fatima*, who is eaves-dropping behind a curtain—than he sinks on his knees and confesses he loves—a woman! Confessor seems to think

that very natural—so does the pit—so do the galleries, whose approbation is rather tumultuous and derisive. That woman is *Fatima*. This the monk don't seem to think so well of; and the moment there is the slightest opposition, the moment he is bid, "Pray, brother, pray!" the knight's love gets as furious as it was cold when every one favored it. "He isn't a Frenchman, he isn't a Christian, he isn't a knight!" He swears his soul belongs more to her than to God! He bawls it out aloud, so loud that *Fatima* is bound to rush in—the father and all his *cortège* do likewise; the monk is ready to ask a blessing on the pair; and there is great rejoicing, somewhat disagreeably interrupted by the news of the return of *Ismael*.

In act the fourth, *Ismael*, who, on the faith of his father-in-law's word, had gone out and obtained a signal victory over a powerful foe of the latter, returning with the spoils is, and with good reason, quite furious at the change he finds. The old gentleman, rather puzzled between his two sons-in-law, tries to compound matters with the Bedouin by the offer of a tent, a horse, a sum of money, a castle—all of which are indignantly rejected. To settle the point the two rivals get up a discussion on the merits

of their several creeds, at the close of which the Templar offers to fight the Arab and two of his companions all at once. Notwithstanding the advantage offered *Ismael* seems to think discretion the better part of valor and cools down. *Fatima* makes her appearance in wedding costume, and the lovers are going to be united—we are not told in what church—when the three emissaries who, in the first act, had been sent out on pressing private business come to report themselves. Their master, who has a conveniently short memory at times, pretends not to recognise them, but *Ismael* insists on explaining. Thereupon, one after the other, these agents of darkness deliver themselves of their fatal secret. The old gentleman vainly tries to make them hold their tongues, they are quite too proud of their exploits. One has caused the King of France to fall into the hands of his enemies; the other has killed the Grand Master; the third has sent the old *Count de Sabran* to his long account! Here's a piece of work! Of course the Templar is mad with grief; he won't hear of *Fatima* or of an alliance with murderers; he is once more a Christian, a Frenchman, a Templar; he clamorously demands his prison chains and instant death. Father-in-law, out of patience, orders

his head off for the third time. Then comes a terrible to-do between the loving father and daughter. Now that the knight has real cause to refuse his daughter, the old land-pirate is quite enraged. This time he is ten times more exacting; the Templar must purchase life at a dearer cost—he must blaspheme his God, he must spit upon the cross, and he must marry *Fatima* into the bargain! As a last argument to save the Christian, the lady draws her dagger—everyone has the little professional tool at hand in this family. If the sword falls on his throat the dagger enters the heart. Once more the order for his death is countermanded, and the fourth act is brought to a close.

It must be confessed the poor Old Man of the Mountain has some trouble to get his only daughter off his hands. She is a great deal more obstinate than her father; she will take none other for her husband than the Christian who, on his side, can't make up his mind if he will take her—at first he won't, then he will, then again he won't, then again he will, and at last he is not quite sure whether he will or he won't. The doubt is cut short by *Ismael*, who comes to besiege the fortress; the Templar sallies forth in defence, conquers the foe, is mortally wounded

and brought it to life. *Samson* falls dead by his side and the curtain drops. It really is quite a relief to see the performer not wear out of his two simultaneous *one-in-two*, between whom he keeps his imagination going backwards and forwards like a shuttlecock during five acts, while he is himself in no way at the time.

"*La Tour de la Montagne*" was performed next week. The failure was now complete to permit of any real attempt in it, and Mademoiselle Rachel was left to seek consolation in the pit sympathy.

In the first of the following month the Theatre Français presented "*Athalie*." The cast was as good as it possibly could be in the direction of acting, and the scenery was then suffering. Ligier, who had seen Talma in his great part of the high priest, and had retained some of his fine traits, was really a good *Jotham*. Bonvallet played *Ahaz*. Mademoiselle Rachel *Athalie*, and her little sister *Deva*, the child-king of the Jews. Unfortunately her choice of this play again proved want of judgment: not, indeed, because the play itself was poor—none could be finer—but that the actress was far too young. To remove this objection Mademoiselle Rachel had recourse to art, and succeeded to such a degree of perfection that the

impression produced upon the spectators was exceedingly painful. To give a faithful representation of this almost centenarian Queen of the Jews, this daughter of Jesabel, whose crimes outnumbered her years, the actress had had a courage none but a woman, young and good looking, could appreciate. Long grey locks covered her own dark ones; her delicate fair skin had disappeared under a vile coating of sienna, on which a steady hand had pitilessly traced the deep furrows of time; even the eloquent lips were withered and disfigured, while the lithe, graceful form was lost in the thick folds in which it was swathed to give it the stouter proportions of age. The thing was overdone; it was not *Athalie*, it was some hideous petrefaction, the mummy of a crowned witch restored to life. The effect was the more unpleasant that it was quite unforeseen. There are frequent instances of young and pretty actresses disguising themselves as old women, but the audience expects the metamorphosis, and the deception is not, as it was in this case, carried through all the play. They return in the happy form of youth and beauty in some of the acts. Besides, the disguise is never carried to so painful an extreme. The change in outward appearance seemed to re-act on her performance, which was feverish and unequal where

and brought in to die. *Fatima* falls dead by his side, and the curtain drops. It really is quite a relief to see the perplexed old man rid of his two troublesome sons-in-law, between whom he keeps his daughter, going backwards and forwards like a shuttlecock during five acts, while he is himself in hot water all the time.

"*La Vieux de la Montagne*" was performed but twice. The failure was too complete to permit of any fresh attempt in it, and Mademoiselle Rachel was fain to seek consolation in the old *repertoire*.

On the fifth of the following month the Théâtre Français revived "*Athalie*." The cast was as good as it possibly could be in the dearth of tragic actors the theatre was then suffering. Ligier, who had seen Talma in his great part of the high-priest, and had retained some of his fine traits, was really a good *Joas*. Beauvallet played *Abner*, Mademoiselle Rachel *Athalie*, and her little sister *Dinah*, the child-king of the Jews. Unfortunately her choice of this play again proved want of judgment; not, indeed, because the play itself was poor—none could be finer—but that the actress was far too young. To remove this objection Mademoiselle Rachel had recourse to art, and succeeded to such a degree of perfection that the

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it should have been calm. In several passages, however, she was very fine, and did full justice to this difficult part. In the last scene of the fifth act, where the Queen feels herself lost and gives full scope to her grief, despair and rage, when the maddened soul breaks forth in open rebellion against the God of the Jews, under whose mighty hand her power is annihilated, she rose to the full height of her grand dramatic genius.

"*Athalie*" was played at the Tuileries before the Royal family, and the King honored Mademoiselle Rachel by expressing in person his approbation.

On the 5th of June Mademoiselle Rachel commenced her performance in Amsterdam. In July she shared with Jenny Lind the favor of the London public. She gave in London twelve performances, playing in succession all the pieces of her *repertoire* with the exception of "*Athalie*" and "*Polyeucte*," both of which were for some reason or other prohibited.

It was during this London season that the *tragédienne* attempted a character in which Mademoiselle Mars herself, the greatest *comédienne* of her day—and her day lasted half a century—Mademoiselle Mars, with her long practice and experience of the stage, her voice so perfect in

its intonations, her charming smile, the aristocratic ease and grace of her manner, had not been completely successful in. The character of *Célimène*, in Molière's "Misanthrope," requires a natural gift as well as great study and a habit of society. That Mademoiselle Rachel, with her eminent tragic powers, should have completely failed in the delineation of this admirable *ensemble* of grace, ingenuity, coquetry, malice, wit, sauciness, high-breeding, gaiety, folly and good sense, the most fascinating of Molière's heroines, is not to be wondered at. Even in London the attempt met with no encouragement. She knew better than to repeat it in Paris. Several tragic actresses have been excellent in comedy, but Mademoiselle Rachel was exclusively a *tragédienne*. Her great error consisted in never weighing well her powers or her strength.

On her return to Paris Mademoiselle Rachel accepted the part of *Cléopâtre* in Madame de Girardin's tragedy of that name, which was brought out on the 13th of November.

The only objection she made to the play was that the authoress had given so plebeian a name to the lover of the Queen of Egypt. She thought something better might have been chosen than *Anthony* for the name of the hero.

The number of times this oft-told tale has been dramatised should, one would imagine, discourage any fresh attempt of the kind. Besides the many *Cleopatras* that have been buried in the sea of oblivion as soon as born, and of which notices in dramatic catalogues alone remain to tell that ever they existed, there are extant above thirty tragedies in various languages of which *Cleopatra* is the heroine. There are sixteen French ones, of which Marmontel's—a weak, frigid production in the old classic style—was the last. Of four Italian ones, that of Alfieri alone has won a distinguished place in point of literary merit—his heroine is, however, a hard, treacherous, selfish, ambitious and wicked woman, less true to history and far less brilliant than the bewitching, fascinating creation of Shakespeare. As a work of real genius, however, it ranks deservedly high. The Germans have “*Octavia*,” of Kotzebue, that has not been able to keep its place on the German stage, or to win one in literature. With Shakespeare leading the van, with Corneille's “*Pompey*” so full of the noblest passages, with Dryden's “*All for Love, or the World well lost*,” with Alfieri's “*Cleopatra*,” full of thought and power and bitter passion, with the host of the unimmortalised that had passed, one would think

nothing had been left unsaid on this threadbare theme. These considerations could not deter the French poetess. The following is the substance of the five acts she gave to the Parisian public; the reader may judge, more or less, whether the additions made to the text of Plutarch have increased the interest of the original.

The first act opens with a scene between *Ventidius*, who brings a message (never delivered) from *Anthony* to *Cleopatra*, and *Diomede*, her secretary. The lengthy speeches of these two subordinates take up almost all the act. They are plotting to prevent the illustrious Triumvir from becoming the sworn vassal of the fascinating Egyptian Circe, and one would think from what they say that the lovers had never yet met. *Ventidius*, as a Roman, is justified in fearing the ascendancy of *Cleopatra*—he would not the neglected sceptre of the world should be left to fall into the hands of *Octavius*—while power is equi-poised between the two rivals, Rome is tyrannised over by neither. The treachery of the Greek (his name and conduct lead one to infer his nation) has no apparent motive. The worthy pair freely discuss the faults of their respective masters. They inform each other and the public, *Ventidius* that *Anthony* is a vain, weak prodigal, besotted liber-

tine; *Diomede*, that *Cleopatra* is an enchantress, who subjugates the world, and is the slave of her own low passions.

This dialogue gives the authoress an opportunity to bring in all the scraps of historical lore the French are so fond of introducing in their tragedies on ancient subjects. The manners and customs of Egypt are brought in, the voyage of Marc Anthony from Italy to the East, his mad prodigality that distributes the plate from his table to his flatterers, and rewards with the gift of a house the cook who has invented a savory sauce, are narrated. *Ventidius* seeks to learn some little peccadillo of *Great Egypt*, some secret, the knowledge of which will give him the power of dissolving, when he thinks fit, the spell it is supposed she will cast round *Anthony*. *Diomede* readily furnishes him with this secret power. A Greek slave, a workman on the wharves, had dared to love the Queen, nay, to declare this love, and offer his life for one hour's return from her. The Queen had smiled—that smile was the acceptance of his love and the seal of his doom. The hour has now come, the slave must die; a subtle poison and the waters of the Nile will obliterate all remembrance of this passing fancy, and the world will never learn that *Cleopatra* could stoop so low.

Even while they tell this fearful tale of love, murder and suicide, the slave enters; he grasps the cup in an ecstasy of delirious love, too happy that he has so cheaply purchased the remembrance of such bliss, and, after an invocation, in twelve stanzas, to Death, praying he may, even amid hell's tortures, preserve his memory green, he quaffs the fatal poison and drops, to all appearance, dead. At this moment the conspirators re-enter with a leech, who has a sovereign remedy, if used in time, that will counteract the poison, and they bear off the still living body to be made an instrument of when required. All this plot is agreed upon and carried into execution at the very door of the Queen's apartments—neither she nor her enemies take much trouble to keep their secrets from each other.

The *Cleopatra* of Corneille in his "Death of Pompey," the *Cleopatra* of Shakespeare, each modelled on that of history, is the woman who uses her sovereign beauty as a conqueror does his sword to bring to her feet the masters of the world. Ambition is the ruling passion—she subjugated Pompey and Cæsar, enslaved Anthony, and punished herself with death for having failed to conquer Octavius. Madame de Girardin's *Cleopatra* is a messalina on the pattern of Victor



Hugo's apocryphal *Marguerite de Bourgogne*, only she is something baser and more degraded, but she gets rid of her low amours in a similar way. The poet should resemble the bee, and gather from the rich stores of history whatever may be used to best advantage for the benefit of mankind — he has no right to leave, like some foul reptile, a slimy trail over her treasures.

In the second act the Queen of Egypt, reclining on her couch, in all the pomp of eastern royalty, is surrounded by her sages and scientific men. The high priest of Hermes is reading a passage from the sacred book, by which we are inducted into the mysteries of the Egyptian Cosmogony and Theogony. We learn that *Athyra* is Chaos, darkness profound, the bed neath the waters in which the world slumbered; that *Pirami* is the day, the radiant spirit; *Kneph* is the creator, father of all the Gods. *Phia*, his son, the god of fire, is the king of thunder and has created heaven and earth. *Typhon* is the spirit of evil, that of good is *Osiris*, the brother and divine husband of the immortal *Isis*. *Toth*, the revealer, invented writing; *Toth* knows all the secrets of nature. *Tméi* is justice. *Athor* is beauty—and both uniting produce truth. *Amethi* is the abyss to which souls descend, &c., &c.

The Queen gives orders, resolves the different questions in abeyance in a very business-like manner, and, dismissing her court, remains alone with *Charmion* and *Iris*. From her terrace she watches for the arrival of *Anthony*, and gives vent to her passionate fondness in accents that betoken no qualms of conscience for the crime she has so lately committed. That heart has evidently never had room for any but one feeling, and it is hard to reconcile its impatient yearnings for the presence of *Anthony* with the slavish inclination attributed to her. The speech in which she complains of the drear and heavy existence she leads in that land that has no spring, no autumn, no winter, where the foot feels beneath the slumbering earth its generations of motionless mummies; where, as in a land of endless murder and of endless remorse, the work of the living is the embalming of the dead, and the most beautiful ornaments are its tombs, is very fine. *Anthony* comes at last, but only to take his leave. He has been told the story of the slave, but though his jealousy and his anger are excited and give him courage to leave the Queen, he makes no charge, gives no vent to his secret feelings;—this is unnatural and very inconsistent with the violence of *Anthony's* temper. He promises to return in two days, he

goes only to concert with his friends in the port. While the Queen is watching the vessels in the fort, an arrow, to which is attached a note, falls at her feet. The note contains advice of the real purpose of *Anthony* who is gone to make friends with *Octavius-Cæsar* and to marry *Octavia*. The enraged Queen will follow her recreant lover and snatch him from her rival's grasp—she will go in the disguise of a slave, she will see this beauty that has been weighed against her's and borne away the prize! The scene in which the Queen questions *Diomede*, who had seen *Octavia* in Rome, as to her rival's looks, is a very poor imitation of Shakespeare's scene between the Queen and the messenger who announces *Anthony's* marriage.

The third act opens at Tarentum, where *Anthony*, already repentant of his new bonds, accuses *Ventidius* of having calumniated *Cleopatra*. The slave has not turned out the willing tool he was intended for; when questioned by *Anthony*, he has denied all, and accusing *Diomede* of an attempt to poison the Queen has ascribed his own apparent death to his having drained unconsciously the poisoned cup meant for her. He has been brought back to life to serve the vile purposes of his treacherous saviour, and that is all. The enraged Triumvir prepares to return to his

regal love. There is a short scene with his lawful lady, and one between the brother and sister, the last, another pale copy of the English poet. There follows a very short scene between *Octavia* and the new slave, in which the latter remains mute. The explanation given to the Roman mistress, is that the girl is of Athens and speaks not the language of this land. After a soliloquy of *Cleopatra*, in which she recognises and envies the power of virtue's charms in the person of the lawful wife, vowing she too will win the respect and honormankind attributes to them—that she will efface all traces of the past, a spectre of that past arises before her affrighted eyes—the poisoned victim of the first act enters. An explanation follows, the treacherous plans of her foes are disclosed, and the Queen is assured of the devotion of one vigilant friend. If he has consented to live, it was to watch over her and render vain every attempt against her—the warning note that told of the marriage of *Anthony* was his. This devotion seems to excite no other feeling in *Cleopatra* than one of contemptuous surprise. To this tale of devoted passion, to his exulting assertion that :

“C'est avec volupté, que je mourrais pour toi!”  
she answers : “Poor fool!”

Indeed not a word falls from the lips of the Queen during five acts that justifies the story of the passing fancy, and we are inclined to think with *Anthony*, "T'was a vile slander;" as for the slave, he was subject to strange hallucinations. There are one or two very charming passages in this scene. Answering *Cleopatra's* fear of being forgotten by *Anthony*, the slave says :

"Est ce toi qu'on oublie ?

Va, tu ne connais pas la force d'un regret,

Ni la tenacité d'un dévorant secret.

On peut vivre sans pain dans des murs qu'on  
assiège,

On peut vivre sans feu dans des déserts de  
neige,

On peut vivre sans eau dans le sable Africain,

On peut vivre sans air dans l'autre de Vulcain,

Mais dans cette démence où ma tête est bercée,

On ne pourrait vivre un jour sans ta pensée !

Un jour sans t'évoquer, sans t'appeler vingt  
fois,

Sans chercher à surprendre un accent de ta  
voix,

Sans aspirer l'air pur que ta bouche respire,

Sans se courber joyeux et fier sous ton empire,

O, reine, ne crains rien, il t'aime, et plus  
encor

L'avare n'a jamais dédaigné son trésor,  
 Et celui qui t'aime n'a ni repos ni trêve,  
 Il n'a plus qu'un espoir, il n'a plus qu'un seul  
 rêve,

C'est de vivre pour toi, de te donner ses jours,  
 Et s'il souffre, sa joie est de souffrir toujours."

[ *Cléopâtre (avec une joie triomphante.)* ]

" Il reviendra ! "

*l'Esclave.*

" Tremblant, redemander sa chaîne, .

Il t'aime, il t'aime encor, je le sens à ma haine.

Tu peux me croire, moi, son tourment est  
 le mien ;

Va, lis dans mon amour les promesses du sien."

*Cléopâtre.*

Mais n'est ce pas sa voix ? j'ai cru la reconnaître."

*l'Esclave.*

" Esclave, cache toi, voici venir le maître ! "

A very short and pretty scene follows between *Anthony* and *Cleopatra*. They depart together, leaving *Octavia* to weep and exclaim :

" En vain je veux me résigner,

Je donnerais tout, rang, fortune, renommée,

Pour le honteux bonheur d'une maîtresse  
 aimée ! "

The rivals thus made to envy each other, the

mistress that follows the world-honored title of wife—the wife the happiness of being beloved, even though that happiness be purchased with shame!—is very good, if not new.

In the fourth act the Battle of Actium has been fought—the world has changed masters; there are no more banquets, no *fêtes*, no Oriental sun gilding the orgies of Mars and Venus—all is blank ruin and despair. “Fortune and *Anthony* part here—the star is fallen.” The remainder of the play is a close imitation of Shakespeare, in all the scenes of the despair and death of *Anthony* as well as the death of *Cleopatra*, with the exception that the countryman who in the English play brings the “pretty worm of Nilus,” in Madame de Girardin’s is the slave of the preceding acts, who, jealous of his cruel mistress’s honor, brings her the means to mock the power of Cæsar. The authoress, compelled to suppress the untranslatable beauties of Shakespeare, has endeavoured to supply their place by the introduction of a feature copied from Dryden—the scolding-match between the wife and the mistress. Shakespeare carefully avoided bringing the rivals together—there was the danger of lowering the interest in the heroine by that which the audience must take in the pure wife neglected for no fault of hers. Dryden has avoided

this, it is true, by making *Octavia* so cold and unamiable a character that no one cares for her, but he has done so at the expense of morality. Madame de Girardin has, in the scene between the mistress and the wife, made the latter more refined by far than Dryden's, but no less cruel. When the Queen and her attendants are lamenting the death of the great Triumvir, calling him thrice in accordance with the Roman custom, another voice suddenly echoes the despairing cry. *Octavia* is come to claim the remains of him whose heart was never hers. In the name of his country, of his sons, the wife claims that the victim be given up to the vengeful gods of Rome. After a scene of mutual recriminations the widow, who has the advantage of belonging to the victorious party, aided by her guards, bears off the body, and the mistress is left to follow the soul.

*Octavia* was evidently the pet personage of the autheress, and for her *Anthony's* worst crime is his criminal love—a crime for which his subsequent misfortunes are only a just expiation of the contempt he has shown for the connubial tie. Every attempt has been made to render the Roman matron more interesting than her Egyptian rival, but in vain. The threat of *Octavia* at the close; “I will live to see thee our



slave, to see thee chained to *Octavius'* conquering car :

“Je vivrai pour te voir notre esclave,  
Pour te voir attachée au char vainqueur  
d'Octave.”

is mean and unfeminine. This ungenerous treatment of a conquered foe, this disrespect for the fortunes of fallen royalty, contrasts with the calm, deep grief of the Queen who bids her attendants allow *Octavia* to enter :

“Elle l'amait aussi, laissons la le pleures.”

The Queen is right when she tells her proud rival that she will not follow her lord, for her grief is too noisy to kill—the grief that kills is less proud :

“Va, ne te flatte pas ; toi, tu pourras survivre,  
Et tu pleures trop haut pour mourir de ton  
deuil,  
Une douleur qui tue est moins folle d'orgueil,  
Tu vivras.”

With the exception of the introduction of one new personage—the slave, who is in himself a fine poetic creation though he debases the Queen, there is nothing new in *Madame de Girardin's Cléopâtre*. The delineation of the heroine's character is neither strong nor spirited. The choice of a theme that had been already chosen by the

great master, continually recalls the vivid coloring, the fiery force, the bold vigor, the numerous flashes of nature contained in the astonishing masterpiece of that gigantic intellect, and makes the poor imitation, by comparison, more dwarfish still.

Mademoiselle Rachel appeared in "Cléopâtre" on the first night of her *rentrée*, very unsuited to her stately, dignified, imperious attitude, so Greek, so antique in its severity of outline, was the character of the soft, languishing Egyptian, all love, all voluptuous impatience, doubting in her anxiety, her fretful jealousy, even the power of her charms. This languishing child of the East could find no fit representation in Mademoiselle Rachel. When the curtain rose at the second act on the Queen of Egypt, who had dressed her part superbly, the sight was very grand, and proved the taste and care with which the tableau had been got up. The costume of Rachel was gorgeous in the extreme, and nothing was overdone. Amid this profusion of gold-embroidered tissues, bracelets, necklaces, ear-drops, stomachers, this dazzling mass of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls, the spectators' attention was fixed on the unsurpassed elegance, the sculptural dignity of her attitudes. Reclining on this couch of Tyrian pur-

ple, she listens with divided attention, for her thoughts are of *Anthony*, to the precepts the high priest reads from the unrolled papyrus.

In December Mademoiselle Rachel absented herself on account, she alleged, of illness, and "*Cléopâtre*" was stopped after it had been acted but eight nights. It was bringing in about 4,000fr. each night. This absence from the stage lasted three months.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

1848.

Mademoiselle Rachel and Mademoiselle Georges—"Cléopâtre and Rodogune"—Influence of Revolutions on Actors—Talma and Lais—Influence of the Revolution of 1848 on Dramatic Literature and Theatricals—Old Things New Named—M. de Lamartine's Rejection of the Red Flag—Suggestions of a Workman on Theatricals—Béranger on the Revolution—A Political *Tragédienne*—"La Marseillaise"—*Le Peuple* of Mademoiselle Rachel in 1844 and in 1848.

THIS year, so eventful for France, was, for Mademoiselle Rachel, the closing one of that period of toil and struggle through which every great artist must pass to approve the talent that none may dare contest—to conquer the position that none may venture to dispute. It was during this year, too, that she committed one of the greatest mistakes of her life. Not content with the high honors she had earned, with the admiration of the refined, of the educated, she endeavored to win popularity among a class whose

approbation true genius never courts. To obtain the short-lived fame that rests on the ever-changing decisions of a fickle mob, she turned her back on those who had supported her throughout her career; she abjured all gratitude, she threw her laurels at the feet of the populace, she ministered to the angry passions of a crowd—she *chaunted*, to use the expression of her admirers, the “Marseillaise.”

Illness, reported to be very serious, had been alleged by Mademoiselle Rachel as a reason for not playing during the first month of this year. To give new interest to her re-appearance, which was announced to take place on Friday, February 25, in the “Cléopâtre” of Madame de Girardin, a rumour was circulated which, had it been confirmed by the event, would have done infinite honor to her heart. It was said, that, to beguile the tedium of a long convalescence, she had studied the part of *Rodogune*, in Corneille’s tragedy of that name, and that her first visit on her recovery had been to Mademoiselle Georges. “I am come, my *dear sister*,” said the younger to the elder star, “to say I have learned *Rodogune* for your sake, and will play it, if you will, to your *Cléopâtre*; I am fully convinced we shall be successful.”

These were noble words ; this was indeed rendering unto Cæsar that which was Cæsar's. The circumstances of Mademoiselle Georges were such at that time that could she, by her re-appearance in a character deemed one of her best, and with the attraction of the present favorite of the public, have brought full houses for a few evenings, the result would have been the addition of much comfort to her declining years. But the kind offer, if ever made, was, like many others of the eminent *tragédiennes*'s, followed by no performance. Indeed the poor grace with which, in the following year, she responded to a call on her services made by Mademoiselle Georges, scarcely corroborates the report of the gratuitous offer of this.

On the 13th of March Mademoiselle Rachel made her *rentrée* in *Camille* of "Les Horaces." The tragedies of Corneille, full of patriotic sentiments, of noble deeds, are peculiarly suited to periods of popular commotions. The spectators seek on the stage the representation of the feelings by which they are themselves actuated, and the actors, entering into the spirit of the reality, communicate its life to the fiction in which they act. During the first revolution Talma, carried away by the torrent, shared its errors and its

enthusiasm ; he not only flattered the public taste by the tragedies of "Charles IX." and the "Death of Cæsar;" but he also carried his republican manifestations into private life ; he and his friend David, the celebrated painter, used to walk in the galleries of the Palais Royal in the dress of Roman Consuls !

As some excuse for the eccentricities of genius it must be borne in mind that in France, and more especially in Paris, the stage is so closely identified with the habits, manners, and customs of ordinary life, so interested in the variations of public opinion, and in the great national events, that it is very difficult for the actors to forbear giving way to the impressions of the moment amid revolutionary tumults.

At certain epochs it is in the allusions the plays of the classic *repertoire* offer, that public feeling seeks a vent. At others—and then the Government itself is the accomplice of the audience—the popular opinions, the patriotism of the day, are expressed in plays written to suit the circumstances and calculated to excite a paroxysm of zeal.

In such cases it is not surprising that the sort of electric current that is then established between the stage and the public should reach from the

latter to the former, and that the actors should in their turn feel in earnest the passions of which they are the interpreters, and which they are not only to express, but also to excite in their hearers.

Nor must it be forgotten that everything violent, sudden, out of the common line, is likely to seduce the imagination of artists. The themes they are most conversant with on the boards are events that overthrow empires and raise new thrones on the ruins of the old. Hence it is natural that those who spend the better part of their lives in this tragical atmosphere, whose minds are constantly dwelling on the vicissitudes of fortune, should readily fall into the wake of a real revolution and become its interpreters, its organs, more especially when they are certain thereby of increasing two-fold the applause attributed to their talent.

This is the only explanation that can be found for the absurd masquerade of Talma, for the illumination of Laïs, the famous singer whose exquisitely sweet and melodious voice uttering the ferociously energetic stanzas of the "Marseillaise" on the boards of the Grand Opera, caused all the audience to fall on their knees.

The aberrations of these men had, however, a



noble source; the foot of the invader was on the soil of France, and the indignant land was heaving as in the throes of an earthquake. Every heart was inspired, every arm was nerved, every brain was fevered by the magic words *gloria* and *patrie*. No such incentives existed in 1848, and when Rachel, whose waking hours were haunted and whose sleep was troubled by the wish to imitate the follies of her illustrious predecessors, attempted to do likewise, she had the misfortune to excite hates that had no object, to call down vengeance where there was no motive, and to insult foes that were absent or no longer in existence. Talma and Laïs had before them a foreign invasion—Mademoiselle Rachel was in the presence of the most absurd and disorganising saturnalia that ever found a place in the history of nations.

To understand the state of things with regard to theatricals at that time some explanation of the influence the revolution had on them is necessary.

In France, the people—that people that may with truth be proclaimed one of the happiest and one of the most mildly governed on the face of the globe—imagine, at every revolution, that they have at last thrown off the yoke of the

most frightful despotism, that they are entering on a new era of happiness and of liberty; the past was the age of iron, the future is to be the age of gold. The amount of insane hopes, wild delusions then entertained is beyond conception. Everything in the fallen *régime* was wrong, everything in the new will be perfect. The first thing to be done is to change the name of the things; old ones are thus supposed to be regenerated, to have changed their nature; the Monarchy becomes a Republic, the Gendarmerie is metamorphosed into the Garde Urbaine or Municipale, the Sergeant de Ville is a Gardien de Paris. Uniforms are turned right side out, and a vast number of functionaries are dismissed. When all these wonderful improvements and reforms have been effected, the groundwork remains unchanged, and if examined will be found immoveable. After the lapse of a few months, during which a great deal of zeal has been displayed, and no little confusion, cost and trouble have been occasioned, all things fall back into the old routine, into the gentle, calm repose of the past.

The saturnalia of 1848, for that popular tumult cannot be called a revolution, were, more especially than any other epoch, characterised by chimerical expectations and extravagant visions. Every in-

stitution constituting a portion of the basis of society was the subject of discussion and animadversion, and more or less shaken to its very foundations. "*The possession of Property is Theft,*" "*the Right to labour,*" Communism, Socialism, Workmen's association, *en commandite*, Emancipation of Women, and many, many other similar follies will witness to posterity the insanity, the delirium of that strange epoch.

The stage, that important element in the life of the Parisians, could not escape in the general catastrophe. The effusions in which the partisans of the revolution threw out their views of reform, as applicable to theatricals, are curious even at this short distance of time.

The revolution broke out, conquered and triumphed, during the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th days of February. No later than the 28th the Government that revolution had established gave its attention to the theatres of the capital—it changed their names. The fact is alluded to in the following glowing terms, in a theatrical bulletin of the day, by one of the warmest adherents of the party in power:—

"The revolutionary and patriotic enthusiasm is taking possession of all hearts. The theatres, reopened this evening, are crowded. Everywhere

the notes of the "Marseillaise" and those of the energetic hymn of our new revolution, "Mourir pour la patrie" rejoice our ears.

"The Théâtre Français from this day takes the name of 'Théâtre de la République.' The Opera is now the 'Théâtre de la Nation' \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* Patriotic plays are everywhere rehearsing."

This was the state of things on the day following that on which M. de Lamartine, importuned by the people, at the Hotel de Ville, to declare the red flag the national flag, made the noble reply that history will record as some extenuation of his political errors :

"Citizens, for my part, never will I adopt the red flag ; and I will tell you, in a few words, why I will oppose it with all the strength of my patriotism.

"The reason is, citizens, that the tri-colored flag has gone round the world with our liberty and our glory, and the red flag has only gone round the Champs de Mars, dragged through floods of the people's blood."

Here we have the extremes meeting—the arbiters of the destinies of France were not so pre-occupied with the perils of the State, but what they could attend to the most petty details of the

administration. The theatrical bulletin of the paper already quoted had the following :

"All the theatres are re-opened. Our reporter visited them all in succession yesterday. *The boxes were all empty*, but all the other seats were filled. The 'Marseillaise' was sung everywhere."

Notwithstanding these tokens of the apparent general satisfaction, the very next day, (March 1st) 'A Workman' thus emitted *his* views on the new organisation to be given to the theatres :

"The *ci-devant* royal theatres are, on account of the high prices of admission, quite closed to the people. This state of things must not be allowed to continue. These theatres, being supported by an enormous subsidy, should, on the contrary, be the most accessible to the people. These theatres are positively inaccessible to the people. Why should they be deprived of the pleasure a fine performance affords? The people are not exacting; let them be allowed seats that can be obtained without lessening their small savings. Give to the people all the enjoyments of the more favored by fortune."

Criticism in black coats united with criticism in blouses; one of its organs spoke as follows :

"The political events that have lately taken place, have naturally had an effect on the Théâtre

Français, always so ready for revolutions. It has thought, with good reason, that the Republican Government could not oppose its constituting itself into a Republic. The Commissary of the Royal Government was expelled like a Tarquin; and citizen Lockroy was proclaimed Dictator of the Republic of Letters in the Théâtre de la République. The Théâtre Français has a great and noble mission to fulfil. It must rise to the height of the present situation. It is no longer to offer vain and frivolous amusements to a nation that requires to hear, on a free stage, noble and elevated language. This was the aim of those generous citizens who, less fortunate than we shall be, endeavored to establish the first French Republic on the basis of Order and Liberty. From the foot of the scaffold, Payen, appealing to authors, enthusiastically exclaims: 'Ye who love arts, who in the retirement of your closets meditate on what may be useful to mankind, ye patriotic writers, develop your plans, weigh with us the power of theatricals. The question is, how to combine their social influence with the principles of Government? A public school must be instituted where taste and virtue shall be alike respected. The committee shall be bound to inquire of genius, to draw out talent, to gather the

fruits of their vigils, to point out to their labors the patriotic aim they are to attain. The committee will be accountable to letters, to the nation, to themselves, for the poet whose lyre they neglect, for the historian to whom they furnish no tablet, for the genius whose flight has not been encouraged and directed."

After this quotation from Payen, the *feuilletonist* continues: "We repeat it, it is to preserve the magnificent language of the masters, both ancient and modern, of our stage, to elevate thought, to teach the heart by means of sublime tableaux, to perfect art in every way, that the efforts of the stage in the new Republic should be directed. In lieu of weak and tame literary and satirical sketches, we need vigorous and energetic sentiments, everything that enlarges the soul, everything that tends to inspire enthusiasm for that which is beautiful and good."

Such was the language of the two epochs at an interval of half a century; such are the ever-disappointed aspirations, the ever-vanishing illusions of all revolutions. The result of Payen's exhortations in 1792 are well known—extravagant tragedies and monstrous dramas.

We will now examine how far and how worthily dramatic literature answered the appeal of 1848.

The play-bills had, during twenty-three days of the month of February, been filled with the announcement of an insignificant comedy of M. Scribe's, called "Le Puff."

The day after this regenerating revolution, this same "Puff," and "Le Chateau de Cartes," are again on the play-bills. A little later the literature of the new era makes its appearance, and we have "Le Dernier des Kermor," certainly one of the last pieces that ought to have been performed under any *régime* whatsoever. Next in order came "Le Roi Attend!" an interlude so void of meaning and of talent that we cannot but be surprised it was ever permitted to see the light. It was plain that such productions would not fulfil the flowery programme that had offered to "elevate thought, to move the heart by sublime tableaux." It was found necessary to have recourse again to old Corneille, and Mademoiselle Rachel came out in "Les Horaces." She acted *Camille* with an energy, a passion such as perhaps she had never before displayed.

It would have been well had she contented herself with repeating the noble Alexandrines of the great poet; no one thought of requiring more of her. But she too had been bitten by the revolutionary demon. The first occasion on which she



exhibited symptoms' of the disease we relate on the authority of a rather indiscreet modern muse, who gives it in a volume she has recently published, containing forty-five letters addressed to her by an immortal bard. We can well imagine that such a correspondence is one to be proud of, yet more delicacy and good taste would have advised less haste and censured the bringing it before the public almost simultaneously with the invitations to the funeral of the illustrious writer.

At the time of the revolution of the 24th of February, Mademoiselle Rachel resided near the Porte Maillot. To enter Paris she was obliged to make her way through armed groups who endeavored to keep their zeal at boiling pitch by singing the epidemical "Marseillaise." The contagion communicated itself to Mademoiselle Rachel, who was going into Paris with Mademoiselle Louise Collet. She commenced singing in the carriage, giving the hymn with the same intonation with which she afterwards brought it out on the stage. "One felt in the air," said Mademoiselle Louise Collet, when she related the incident to Béranger, "like a mighty breath of hope that bore along with it all youthful hearts."

"I greatly fear," replied Béranger, who was

no longer young, and who had as much good sense as genius, "I greatly fear we have been made to tumble down the stairs we should have walked down."

Notwithstanding the threatening aspect of the horizon, the *rentrée* of Mademoiselle Rachel was not without *eclat*; she had learned a new rôle and made her *débüt* as a political *tragédienne*. Having laid aside the peplum of *Camille* she appeared between the acts attired in a long and very full white muslin dress; she wore no ornament in her dark hair; in her right hand she held the tricolored flag. Never had her features, well suited and accustomed as they were to a tragic look, worn so terrible an expression as they did at that moment. As she came on towards the footlights, with a slow majestic tread, an undefined sensation of fear thrilled the audience, even before she had uttered a word. The countenance was of a livid hue, the eyebrows, swerving from their finely-drawn lines, wreathed like small serpents over the dark eye, glowing in its blood-red orbit with a strange, wild fire, telling a bitter tale of past wrong and of present revolt, of long-cherished, unquenchable hatred, of fierce, pitiless revenge; the lips were pregnant with unuttered maledictions; the nostrils, passionately

dilated, seemed, like those of the war-horse, to scent from afar the carnage of the battle-field. The whole figure in its terrific grace, its sinister beauty, was a magnificent representation of the implacable Nemesis of antiquity, and struck every heart with terror and admiration.

Raising her arm with a motion which, throwing back the wide sleeve, left it bare to the shoulder, she commenced the hymn :

“Allons enfants de la patrie.”

She did not sing, she did not declaim, she uttered it somewhat after the fashion of the ancient *melopœia*, something between a chant and a recitation, to which her tones, at times sharp and harsh, at others hard and metallic, and then again deep and cavernous, like distant thunder, gave extraordinary effect. Her attitudes, her gestures, the motions of her head, all expressed admirably the sense of each stanza. The brow, at one moment bowed with shame and grief at the recollection of the woes and miseries she spoke, at another proudly raised as though it had just thrown off the yoke of the oppressor, the foot spurning the enslaved earth, the nerves quivering beneath the intensity of fixed resolution, all betrayed a deadly thirst for vengeance. As a *finale* to this splendid piece of mummary the

inimitable artist, apparently overcome by her patriotic feelings, sank on her knees, clasping to her heart the banner, the folds of which fell around her *statuesque* figure in the most picturesque manner; then rising abruptly, she waved the flag with the cry of "Aux armes, citoyens! &c," to which the spectators, nearly crazed with excitement, responded with the most prolonged and deafening applause.

A *feuilletonist* remarked very justly that the *gratis* audience, with which the provisional government had filled the house, preferred one stanza of Rouget de L'Isle to all Corneille and Racine, with M. Ponsard thrown in as a make-weight.

This *heartfelt, impromptu* enthusiasm, was as carefully studied and rehearsed as any of Mademoiselle Rachel's other characters. A poetess of no little celebrity, who had the curiosity to go and see the *tragédienne* behind the scenes, found her standing, banner in hand, awaiting the signal to go on the stage. Madame Waldor described her as looking *coldly excited*. The words express exactly the preparatory *working up* she was going through.

As far as regarded mere art—the art of the statuary—the performance was perfection; in a

moral sense nothing could be in worse taste than this appeal to the angry passions of an ignorant and excitable multitude. It was not Mademoiselle Rachel's fault if her public was less ferocious than that of 1792. She did her part towards rousing it. But, whatever their errors, the revolutionists of 1848, notwithstanding silly as well as criminal incitations, were guiltless of shedding one drop of blood.

How the most magnificent productions of the human mind may be perverted to idle uses, defiled and degraded by being brought forward out of place and out of season, has been repeatedly proved by the senseless manner in which that grand hymn the "*Marseillaise*," has been prostituted and made the herald of murder, arson and pillage, the purveyor of the headsman, the incentive to every crime the mind of man can conceive, the arm of man can perpetrate. It is difficult to understand by what connection of ideas people are induced to bellow forth a frantic call for the "*Marseillaise*" in a place of public amusement. Those who were assembled in the house when this sad farce was acted had met after the day's toil of mind or body to rest from the cares of life for a few hours; they sought calm and repose; evil thoughts slumbered and the noble lessons of mag-

nanimity, honor and valor, of a Corneille could not fail to awaken corresponding feelings in the hearers. What urgent motive could tempt any reasoning creature to interrupt these quiet rational pleasures, to evoke reminiscences of bloody scaffolds and exterminating civil wars? This fatal poem recalled, it is true, some of the victories of France, but it had been also the *de profundis* of thousands of the noblest and wisest of her children.

Jules Janin, who had the good sense and the courage to raise his voice against this unhallowed scene, wrote an eloquent article on its mischievous tendencies. What, indeed, has the dread cry of "To arms!" to do with peaceable citizens? Where was the danger? What frontier was attacked? What enemy was to be expelled? Whose impure blood was to be shed? Wherefore this sudden cry of mad dog? Alas! the idiots whose breath raises this devastating storm, who howl forth this war-cry of Cain, have not the slightest idea of its import. They know not that they wield at random a double-bladed weapon, one steel the salutary instrument that cures an evil, the other the poisoned tool that creates a worse one. Not for these poor fools and dupes, or for the monsters who degraded it to their own purposes was this fanaticising hymn written; not for these, but for men who

sang it bareheaded, with faith-inspired voices, on their march to their threatened frontiers. *Certès*, the thing was worth some reflection, seeing that it had overturned altars, overthrown dynasties, depopulated whole provinces. Serious men, whose hearts retain some fear of God, some love for humanity, will meditate long before they shout this exterminating cry; and, above all, they will choose some more fitting place for its anathematizing burthen than the temple of pleasure. They will remember that to this very tune, valiant men, helpless mothers and daughters, innocent babes, were marched to the guillotine, butchered like sheep in the shambles, hurried into eternity by fire, water and the sword. Among that very audience that gazed admiringly on her who gave such life to its spirit of discord, few reflected that almost every family there had had one or more of its members offered up as a victim to satiate the sanguinary feelings its revolutionary chorus awakened.

All hail, all homage, all respect all love to the "Marseillaise" marching to the battle-field, shoeless, ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-armed, unpaid, levelling the snow-clad Alps, treading deeper into earth the dust of the Cesars, crossing the astonished and conquered Rhine, and winning the well-contested fields of Austerlitz and Marengo!

But to the "Marseillaise" of the club, the pot-house, the *carrefours* and the barricades, to the "Marseillaise" that instigates the midnight assassin, and the cowardly worker of infernal machines, to the "Marseillaise" of the revolutionary tribunal, that drags to the guillotine, that lays waste vast districts, that depopulates towns whose walls crumble at its sounds as at that of the trumpet of the destroying angel, to this hell-born beldame, the anathema of nations! Let us hope her notes may be effaced from the memory of men, and especially of Frenchmen.

That these considerations should have had any weight on the cosmopolitan Jewess, whose country was that which paid her best, whose feelings of humanity or of gratitude weighed as nought against the all-sovereign shekel, was not to be expected. And yet it is probable that she erred from ignorance. Accustomed to make everything subservient to the love of money, she did not pause to think what evils might arise from the means she used. She forgot, perhaps, that she was raising this flag against her best friends. She forgot, too, that the time was not far gone by when Jules Janin recalled her to a sense of the respect due to that very "people" she was now cringing to so obsequiously, and



advised her, when in the part of *Bérénice* she spoke of "the people," especially as the words were there meant to designate the Roman nation, not to utter them with the scorn and contempt she did.

## CHAPTER XIX.

1845.

Decree of the Citizen Minister Ledru Rollin—"Lucrèce"—  
 Nemesis wearing the Insignia of a Commissaire de Police  
 —Grand National Performance—The Blouse Triumphant  
 —"Les Horaces"—"Le Malade Imaginaire"—"La Jeune  
 République"—"Le Roi Attend!"—"La Marseillaise"—  
 Bouquet Monstre—A Sovereign More Despotic than the  
 Last—Second Grand National Performance—Honorable  
 Testimonial to Mademoiselle Rachel—Enthusiasm at a  
 Low Ebb—Grand Fêtes and no Bread—Theatricals under  
 Louis Philippe and under the Provisional Government—  
 Death of Vernet—Mademoiselle Rachel in two Characters  
 of the Same Play.

IN the meanwhile the claim put forth by "A  
 Workman," for a few cheap seats for the people,  
 in the *ci-devant* royal theatres, had set the wits of  
 citizen Ledru Rollin to work, and the result was  
 the following decree published by that too famous  
 minister :

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Y

“THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR.

“Inasmuch as the State is bound to furnish such labor to the people as shall enable them to earn a living, it is also bound to encourage all efforts tending to make them participators of the moral enjoyments that elevate the soul. Inasmuch as the performance of the masterpieces of the French stage cannot but develope worthy and noble feelings,

“On the offer made by citizen Lockroy, Commissary of the Government at the Théâtre de la République,

“On the report of the Director of the Fine Arts,

“DECREES :

“The Commissary of the Government at the Théâtre de la République, is authorised to give National Performances, at short intervals.

“Said performances to consist of works of the best French dramatic authors, acted by the *elite* of the actors of that theatre. Between the acts national airs will be played.

“All the seats in the house will be numbered and each seat will have a corresponding ticket.

“Said tickets will be distributed to the twelve Municipalities of Paris, to the Hotel de Ville, and

to the Prefecture of Police, and thence to the clubs, schools, factories, workshops, and poorer citizens, who will obtain them by drawing for them.

“Paris, March, 24, 1848.

“Signed,

“LEDRU ROLLIN.”

Pride, the sin of the fallen angel, betrays itself, strange to say, more openly in France, during periods of revolution than at any other time. Each profession, each trade, each calling, believes itself specially appointed to take an active part, and is convinced of its superior importance in the guidance of the destinies of the nation.

“Our mission is taking a wider range,” exclaimed M. Hippolyte Lucas, the critic of “*La Siècle* ;” “it rises to the height of a public function. Henceforward there will weigh upon us a responsibility to be exercised, not, as that of the censorship, in secret, but in public, before the eyes of all. Criticism has become a witty and sceptical amusement. For this it cannot be blamed, all its efforts to be aught else having proved useless. The moment has arrived when everything defective in the organisation and tendency of the stage must be attacked without mercy. We shall not be found wanting in this

honorable duty. We shall not devote ourselves merely to the preservation of the sacred rules of language and of taste, we are also bound to hasten every possible reform on which depends the future of literature and public education through the teachings of the drama."

It was rather strange that this sapient critic had not thought of putting all these excellent theories in practice under a Government that had, perhaps too imprudently, left to the press the most unbounded liberty. It would seem that a revolution was necessary to make him understand his mission.

This was the second time that dramatic literature had been put to a revolutionary test. Criticism and the drama have remained what they were previous to these cataclysms. The world is upset merely to prove the emptiness and incapacity of all these brainless innovators, the vanity of their illusions, the chimerical nature of their pretensions.

Not one new work of note was brought out on the French stage during this new *régime*. "L'Avanturière," by Emilie Augier, had been written and received previous to the month of February, and had, besides, no revolutionary idea attached to it. The only thing accomplished

was the transplantation of M. Ponsard's "Lucrèce" from the Odéon to the rue de Richelieu. M. Ponsard's tragedy had been originally intended for the Théâtre Français, but in consequence of the refusal of Messieurs the Players in ordinary to his Majesty, had been brought out at the Odéon. This refusal had been stigmatised as an act of heinous injustice—it was simply an error of taste.

"Lucrèce" was acted at the Théâtre Français, *alias* de la République, on the 24th of March, and Mademoiselle Rachel obtained, as the heroine, great applause. Her calm, quiet dignity was peculiarly well suited to the character of the fair young Roman matron. The vehemence, the passion with which it was acted by Madame Dorval, who had created the *rôle* at the Odéon, had disappeared; but, if Mademoiselle Rachel's acting was colder, it was more correct, more classically tragic than that of the famous melo-dramatic actress.

The applause Mademoiselle Rachel elicited in "Lucrèce" was perhaps no less due to the allusions the play contained than to her talent. She produced, however, a great sensation in the seemingly insignificant line of the dream:

"J'essayais de bouger et je ne pouvais pas."

The other passages of the play that could be interpreted as allusive to actual circumstances were received with tremendous applause. The lines

“ C'est peu de songer à détruire,  
Si l'on ne songe encor comme on veut reconstruire,”  
were twice called for and greeted with four rounds. The lines :

“ Valère si mon vœu doit prevaloir ni moi.

Ni personne jamais ne se nommera roi.”  
met with the same tokens of approbation.

The theme of this tragedy is based on Livy's narrative. Those who like political discussions dramatised have their taste fully gratified in the second act. There is very little dialogue, the speeches are too long to permit of more. All the *dramatis personæ* have a great deal to say and take up a long while each whenever they get a chance. *Brutus*, especially, is a great talker. The play should end where *Brutus*, *Collatinus* and *Lucretius* kneel and invoke thrice the name of *Lucrèce*.

The real tragedy of the evening was “*La Marseillaise*,” into which Mademoiselle Rachel, no longer content with the tri-colored flag, had introduced a new element.” Nemesis had bound round her waist the tri-colored sash of a Commissary of Police in the exercise of his functions.

Her patriotism was constantly on the alert for new ways of displaying itself.

"A portion of the members of the Provisional Government witnessed this performance," remarks M. Hippolyte Lucas; "we have already noticed several times, with pleasure, the presence in this theatre of the citizens who have assumed the responsibility of the State's great interests. This augurs well for the destinies of the stage, which are linked, more than is generally supposed, with those of the State. Free national performances are announced. Let now such authors as can make the heart of the nation vibrate come forward, and we shall indeed have magnificent performances. Paris will be quite the Athens of modern civilisation. It is said that the great name of Georges Sand will consecrate the first of these performances."

We shall now see what became of this fine programme and how far it realised its pompous announcements.

The popular and gratuitous performances claimed by "A Workman" and decreed by citizen Ledru Rollin took place. The first, given under the name of "Première Représentation Nationale," was described by the same M. Hippolyte Lucas who had been one of its promoters :



“With the exception of a part of the orchestra reserved for the members of the Provisional Government and for the press, all the seats were occupied by—I will not say the people, for we are all of the people—but by that happy crowd whose means do not usually permit of their enjoying so choice a treat. The triumphant blouse leaned on the front of the *balcon*; the caps of Rigolette and of Jenny L'Ouvrière reigned in the once-privileged boxes, and the Gamin de Paris, who had neglected, and with good reason, going to the printing-office with M. Paul de Kock's proof-sheets, in order to hear Georges Sand's prologue of “*Le Roi Attend!*” handed his cap through the ranks of the spectators for the reception of popular donations to be invested in the purchase of a monster bouquet to be presented to Mademoiselle Rachel after the ‘*Marseillaise*.’”

“The spectators behaved as the Parisian people usually do at free performances. They were remarkably quiet, and proved themselves possessed of admirable instinct to understand all the allusions, of rare aptitude of heart and intellect to note and appreciate all the poet's beauties.”

“*Le Roi Attend?*” was a species of imitation of Molière's “*Impromptu de Versailles*.” Molière had been busily engaged in the preparation of one

of the improvised pieces sometimes asked for by Louis XIV. Worn out with fatigue, vexed by the ingratitude of the actors, who pretended they could not play a thing they had never learned, annoyed by the messengers who were constantly sent to hurry him, the great poet dropped asleep on the unfinished page. During his sleep the background of the stage filled with clouds, which, parting, disclosed, surrounded by a halo, and grouped around the Muse, represented by Mademoiselle Rachel, Eschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, symbolising the poetry of the ancients; Shakespeare, Voltaire and Beaumarchais, representatives of the modern world. These personages, both retrospective and perspective, for they represented to Molière the past and the future, sustained and encouraged him. They related to the sleeping poet the influence they have had on the human mind, that which he himself, Voltaire and Beaumarchais would have. They told him dramatic poets prepared the freedom of nations; they sowed the seeds of revolutions reaped by the people. After these philosophical lessons the clouds closed, the vision disappeared, and the sleeping poet was awakened by his faithful servant, who told him the King was waiting. Molière exclaimed :

“ What ! are there yet kings ? ”

The whole prologue was written to bring in this sentence, which contained all the wit of the piece.

This time, however, the King who waited wore no regal mantle or flowing wig; it was the more powerful people of 1848 whose sovereignty was acknowledged and whose protection is implored for the Théâtre de la République by the obsequious poet.

This poor piece of flattery, which did little credit to the name of the author, scarcely survived the evening. It was followed by "Les Horaces;" a new song, "La Jeune République," composed by Madame Pauline Viardot, and sung by Roger of the Opera; "Le Malade Imaginaire," by Molière; and "La Marseillaise," chaunted by Mademoiselle Rachel, the burden being taken up and repeated by fifty of the pupils of the Conservatoire, dressed in white muslin, and wearing the indispensable tri-colored sash. An accompaniment of tocsin, drums, cannon and waving of banners came in with the last stanza, and quite delighted the audience, who *encored* the noisy patriotism most enthusiastically.

The evening was concluded with the presentation of the Brobdignagian bouquet. This national offering was made in the name of the people to Ma-

demoiselle Rachel by the aforesaid Gamin de Paris, who climbed over the footlights for the purpose. Loud applause greeted this ovation, and a second collection was made for the poor in order to show that the tax to which the latter are entitled on ordinary nights was not forgotten on free ones.

No cost, no flattery, no trouble was spared to please the people. The greatest artists were brought together, and invention was tasked to diversify the amusements offered to them. How far all these efforts were attended with success was shown no later than on the second of the free nights. In order to avoid offending the pride of the many-headed sovereign, far more arbitrary and exacting than the one lately deposed, the performances were not called free, but national.

The second of these *représentations nationales*, took place on the 21st of April. The result contrasted greatly with that of the first one. Time was speeding on and bringing with it the consequences of the follies committed. The people began to reflect—their leaders gave them *circences*, but without the *panem* they had little inclination to enjoy them. Enthusiasm had until then been the order of the day, but enthusiasm is incompatible with hunger, and it was now at a low ebb. We will leave the partisans of *le peuple* to narrate

the festive scene. Symptoms of dissatisfaction are evident in the preamble of this apologist of the new state of things, for he begins by animadverting on the new name given to the house.

“We have witnessed the second free performance at the Théâtre de la Republique. And wherefore Théâtre de la Republique? Was this flattery to the new form of Government that rules us very necessary? It seems to us there was nothing monarchial in the fair name of Théâtre Français, known throughout the world, illustrated by so many real geniuses, by so many celebrated interpreters, it was almost ingratitude on the part of the players to despoil it of this great title. Well, what is done cannot be helped, and so now for the Théâtre de la République.

“The night before last was one of free performance. Mr. Lockroy, the new manager, and the Minister of the Interior have combined to invite the people every fortnight to occupy the best seats, and see the works of the masters of the drama acted by the former players in ordinary to the King. We had expected to find the house filled from top to bottom, the boxes adorned with happy faces full of astonishment at finding themselves there; we thought to have been elbowed in the lobby by the *blouse* and the *bourgerou*, to

have heard loud, hearty peals of laughter, or frank, noisy, unstinted applause at the pathetic parts of the performance. We found nothing of all this. In the first place the house was almost empty; the first two rows of orchestra seats were filled with the *Enfants de Paris*; on all the others were members of the Provisional Government, the chief functionaries, a number of the officers of the *Garde Urbaine*, and five or six members of the press; the boxes were partly occupied by inferior functionaries; scattered here and there were a few workmen. In a word the house had all the appearance of that of the Porte St. Martin on ordinary occasions. The chill aspect communicated itself to the boards; the performance of "Phèdre" was weak, heavy and monotonous. The voices of the *Enfants de Paris* and the "Marseillaise" had all the honors of the evening."

With reference to the latter portion of the entertainment the critic continued:

"We lack words to express what we feel. It is not a woman, it is not an artiste that we see, it is a goddess of antiquity, solemn, grave, austere, illuminated by flaming rays, who, from the depths of her cave, comes forth to fill our souls with anger, hatred and revenge. When Mademoiselle

Rachel utters the revolutionary hymn, we turn hot and cold by turns, the blood rushes to the heart, the arteries throb, the eye quails before the fixed look of the pythoness, and we have not even the power of motion to express all the admiration this imposing and sublime sight inspires."

The symptoms of discouragement were too evident to be denied. Notwithstanding all these puffs to fill the house it had remained empty; notwithstanding all the revolutionary convulsions of Mademoiselle Rachel, the few spectators had remained frigid. Yet the *tragédienne* made super-human efforts to fill the treasury and avert the ruin that was impending. Her civism had its source in the anxious wish to sustain the house whose ruin was sure to impoverish her own coffers, and this motive was sufficient to call out all her energy; she played without cessation and with indefatigable zeal all the plays of her *repertoire* in succession. While half the theatres were compelled to close and the others were on the verge of ruin, her exertions were mainly instrumental in supporting the house of the rue de Richelieu for some little time, and were acknowledged by the *sociétaires* in the following letter:

“DEAR CAMARADE,

“YOU have double reason to feel proud and happy. Never has your success been so brilliant, never has it been so useful to the interests of our company. You have struggled for us with indefatigable devotion against the difficult circumstances which for the past two months have afflicted all artists. You have maintained the Théâtre de la République in a more prosperous state than any other has attained.

“We are proud to see in this, dear *camarade*, not so much the accomplishment of a duty as a proof of real sisterly friendship. Accept in return the unanimous thanks of your friends and brothers. They hope this letter, signed by them all, will remain to you one of the most precious moments of your dramatic career, for if it is noble and praiseworthy to obtain triumphs as brilliant as yours, it is no less flattering to have deserved the affection and gratitude of all one's comrades.

“The artists' *sociétaires* of Théâtre de la République.”

Here followed all the signatures.

Alas! this amity and concord was to be of short duration—the *chère camarade* was soon to



do battle as steadily against these dearly-beloved brothers and sisters as ever she had for them, to renounce the demigods of her youth, to turn her back on the temple, to abjure—even the “Marseillaise!”

But we will not anticipate those sad times—the present were quite bad enough. Even Mademoiselle Rachel and the “Marseillaise” were unable to make head long against the adverse wind then blowing. If the house was empty on free nights with extra performances, what could be expected on ordinary occasions when admittance was to be paid. The Grand Opera itself was even less attended than the theatres. Forsaken by the managers, Mirecourt and A. Adam, when it took the name of Théâtre de la Nation, it had formed itself into a company in imitation of the Théâtre Français, but, notwithstanding this compliment to the *nation*, the latter—at least that portion of it that inhabited Paris—had its time too much taken up every night by the seventy-four political clubs it attended, to have any to spare for theatricals. The opera had less chance than the drama, lyrical masterpieces offering no food to the political passions of the crowd.

On the 15th of May, Monsieur Charles de Matharel, the editor of “Le Siècle,” who saw

things with less enthusiastic eyes than M. Hippolyte Lucas, expressed himself as follows ;

“ We have said, and all our *confrères* with us, that it was necessary something should be done for the theatres, that they were in such a state of crisis that, should Government not come promptly to the rescue, they would inevitably be compelled to close. Our forebodings have, alas ! been realised ; several houses have already been closed, others are preparing to do likewise, and, with the exception of one or two that are maintained by a subsidy, Paris will not have a single theatre ! ”

To this point, in the space of two months and a-half, had the Republic of the 24th of February brought dramatic art. The Provisional Government had other work on its hands than to attend to the requirements of the stage. It had now no time to share the amusements of the triumphant blouse, to sit between the caps of Rigolette and Jenny L'Ouvriere. Nor did the governed fail to taunt their chosen government with the disheartening prospect.

“ The existence of a hundred thousand persons is of so little importance ! Artists, men busy with literary and dramatic works, are of so little consequence, it matters little what be-

comes of them! Truly, those who govern have something else to do than to trouble themselves about such people! Besides, artists have no pickaxes, spades, and shovels; they do not go down into the street in warlike array, with flags and drums; they do not talk loudly, they make no threats; neither do they obtain anything, and presently they and their families, and all the little trades and callings, artistic, literary, and dramatic, that are more or less dependent on the theatres for means to earn their bread, must starve.

“The result of all this is that the Republic gets few benisons among artists.

After all these lamentations and recriminations, it became necessary to beg assistance. Five hundred francs per evening was asked for each theatre. It was proposed that, in requital, tickets to that amount should be sent to the *mairies* to be distributed gratuitously. To this was to be added a free performance once a-week. It was not borne in mind that on the 21st of the preceding month, the innovator, Lockroy, aided by the Minister of the Interior, had failed to attract an audience, though the entertainment consisted of *Made-moiselle Rachel* in “*Phèdre*,” and “*La Marseillaise*,” with the Provisional Government to boot.

A month later, on the 18th of June, matters were still in a deplorable state, and this was made more apparent by the publication of the receipts of this year, compared with those of the preceding one, when people lived under a monarchy, the destruction of which was to bring about such happy changes.

The following table shows the receipts of the first three months of each year in seven theatres:—

	1847	1848
Variétés .. ..	228,455 25	183,966 50
Gymnase .. ..	218,662 50	103,191 70
Montansier .. ..	222,218 20	118,195 65
Porte St. Martin .	199,146 25	122,334 65
Folies Dramatiques..	107,294 40	696,18 70
Délassements Comiques	37,688 70	22,334 85
Funambules .. ..	25,735	7,751 90
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Francs	1,089,100 30/100	577,698 95/100
	<hr/>	<hr/>

The above shows a falling off of nearly fifty per cent. in 1848.

It is worthy of notice that Government securities depreciated in nearly the same ratio, as may be seen by the following quotations:

On the 19th February, 1848, 5% were at francs,  $116\frac{7}{100}$ , and on the 15th June, at francs 68.

On the 19th February, 1848, the 3<sup>o</sup>/<sub>0</sub> were at francs, 74<sup>90</sup>/<sub>100</sub>, and on the 15th June, at francs 46.

The stage lost at this time one of whom it had reason to be proud, the comic actor Vernet. The memory of this excellent actor and worthy man, whose reputation and talent were far above the vulgar and obscure theatre that he illustrated by his numerous and varied creations, was not honored by a single tribute of homage or of kind remembrance. Not one of the authors who were indebted to him for fame or wealth found a word to say over the grave of the proud and witty *Père de la débutante*, of the lover of *Madame d'Egmont*, of the grotesque representative of *Madame Gibon*, of *Mathias l'Invalide*, and of so many other original and charming types.

It is true that Vernet did not pertain to that class of artists who make use of their talents to evoke popular passions, to provoke the effusion of blood, to excite fratricidal hates, to brave absent foes. At an epoch very anterior, and during the effervescence of a former revolution, Vernet was called upon to give the sanguinary hymn of "Rouget de l'Isle." He answered the request neither by singing, chaunting, or reciting it. He gave proof on this occasion of the ready wit and

good sense that characterised his honest and peace-loving soul. It was in the year 1830, a *vaudeville*, entitled "Le Mendiant" was acting at the Variétés, and Vernet had the part of the beggar fiddler. At that passage where he asks his friend what he shall play to him, a voice from the pit cried;

"La Marseillaise!"

To which a large proportion of the audience thundered:

"No!"

To avert the impending disturbance, Vernet immediately commenced playing the well-known old air of "J'ai du bon tabac."

In the month of May Mademoiselle Rachel tried another scheme to attract the public. She had remarked that in M. Ponsard's tragedy the two chief female characters, *Lucrèce* and *Tullie*, never come on the stage in the same scene. This suggested the idea of playing both parts the same evening. The experiment was tried on the boards of the Italian Opera-house, on the occasion of a benefit obtained by her sister Sarah, and proved a complete failure. Notwithstanding the difference of costume, the result was a confusion in the minds of the spectators that quite marred the effect. Mademoiselle Rachel's features did not possess the

mobility of expression indispensable for such a task. Half the time the audience were at a loss to know whether it was *Lucrèce* or *Tullie* that was speaking.

It was not the first time that, in order to draw full houses, the dignity of tragedy had been lowered by the use of these clap-trap disguises. But the experiment rarely meets with any success. Comedies, written expressly for the purpose, such as "*Frosine, ou la Dernière Venue*," "*Les Jumeaux Venitiens*," and others, have been tolerated, but tragedy will not bear these carnival tricks.

After this season of unusually active service Mademoiselle Rachel took her customary leave of absence.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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